

10. Attitudes of the Heart – Contentment

This week's attitude of the heart is that of *contentment*. To be content is to be *satisfied*. It is the opposite of lust or covetousness. The apostle Paul was a great example of contentment. Look at Philippians 4:11-13.

📖 Philippians 4:11. **Q.** What had Paul learned?

Q. v12. In what circumstances was Paul able to exercise the attitude of contentment?

Q. v13. How was he able to do this?

If there is an attitude that is completely foreign to our present world it is the attitude of *contentment*. We are constantly bombarded with advertisements designed to shake us out of our contentment and to breed in us a sense of need, want, entitlement and discontentment. We then head out of our houses and into the shopping malls! Our economy is driven by the fuel of discontentment.


In a society where meaning and fulfillment are often derived from material goods, it can be difficult even for a Christian to live in contentment. To help us to have a continual attitude of contentment we should remember the following six principles:

1. Stuff Does Not Produce Satisfaction

📖 Ecc 5:10. **Q.** According to Solomon, the richest man that ever lived, what will never bring satisfaction?


👉 **Discuss.** Why do you think the man that loves “silver” and “increase” will never be satisfied with these things?

We live in a relatively affluent society and as such, we rarely have pressing needs that cannot easily be met. We have quick access to everything we could want or need and are provided the means to obtain those things whether we can afford them or not! And then we are told that our success and self-worth is measured by how much *stuff* we have obtained. This distorted view of contentment and material goods is in direct contradiction to what Jesus taught:

 Luke 12:15 **Q.** What did Jesus warn us to avoid? _____


Q. What *does not* define the quality of one's life?

Contentment will not come as long as we have a distorted view of material things. Deriving satisfaction and fulfillment from *things* is putting an expectation on material things that only God can fulfill. This world's continual quest for more and more stuff is really a quest for meaning, fulfillment and satisfaction – something material things can never produce.

 **Discuss.** Why do you think that some of the richest men and women in the world seem to be the most dissatisfied?

2. **Wants Are Not Needs**

Many folks are discontent because they have convinced themselves that their *wants* are actually *needs*.

 **Discuss.** Imagine that you are on a sinking ship and the only way to survive is to throw overboard extra weight. What things in your life would go first? How much that you own is actually necessary and how much is just dead weight?

 Luke 12:22-28 **Q.** What did God promise to provide for us?

 1 Tim 6:8. **Q.** What did Paul tell Timothy we should be content with?

Q. Based upon your answers above, how could you summarize our needs?

God has promised to provide for the needs of his children. But God’s measure of *needs* and our measure of needs is often very different. Whereas we might consider convenience and entertainment as necessities, God simply says “food and clothing”.

📖 1 Tim 6:7. **Q.** What will happen to everything we have accumulated when we die?

All the *things* that we have worked so hard at accumulating in this life will ultimately be left behind and only those things done for the glory of God will remain (1 Cor 3:11-15).

📖 Matt 6:31-34. **Q.** If God will provide our needs, and material goods are not of any eternal importance, where should we focus our efforts and desires? (see also Col 3:2)

3. All That We Have Comes From God

Oftentimes what leads us to a spirit of discontentment or covetousness is a feeling of injustice regarding our circumstances. We feel we deserve more or are “owed” more than what we have. We compare ourselves to others and decide that our standard of living ought to be higher than it is. This type of discontentment only comes when we first lose sight of the fact that God is in control and that He is our provider. We see an unfortunate example of this in Numbers chapter 11.

📖 Numbers 11:1. **Q.** What displeased the Lord? What was God’s response?

📖 Numbers 11:4-6. **Q.** It wasn’t long after God’s fiery judgment that discontentment reared its head once again. Who started the complaining in verse 4?

Q. Who else began to complain? _____.

These families became dissatisfied with the manna which God had provided for them and began to lust after the foods which they had in Egypt. It is not surprising that the ungodly mob of people who followed the Jews out of Egypt became discontented. But what is shameful is that *God’s people*, taking their cue from this “mixed multitude”, also began to murmur and complain.

📖 Numbers 11:6. **Q.** Who provided the manna? (Exodus 16:15).


Q. v6. How did these complainers refer to God's provision of the manna?

God miraculously provided manna for Israel in the wilderness. This food was both flavorful and filling (Ex 16:18,31). It was enough to satisfy the *needs* of Israel, but not enough to satisfy their *lusts*. They became discontent with God's provision and began to crave the food from the Godless nation of Egypt. When we turn to the world to satisfy our lusts we are no better than the Israelites who were longing for Egypt. And like the Israelites, our lustful attitude has discontentment with God as it's source.

 Numbers 11:18. **Q.** What did Israel say about their life in Egypt?

 Exodus 3:7. **Q.** Israel had a short memory. What motivated God to deliver them from Egypt?

Israel complained in Egypt, were delivered by God, and complained some more. This is evidence that discontented people will not be satisfied in any circumstances!


 Numbers 11:33. **Q.** God ultimately sent an abundance of quail to be eaten by all the people. **Q.** What happened when they were in the midst of satisfying their lust for meat?


God had already planned to execute judgment upon these discontent, unthankful complainers before he sent quail for them to eat. He had given them over to their lusts and allowed them to reach the unfortunate end of their murmuring. Instead of being content with a little and the Lord, they preferred an abundance without Him. They got their wish!

 Summarize Proverbs 15:16.

Whether we have an abundance or whether we lack we are in circumstances orchestrated by God. He is the sovereign of the universe and the provider of everything (Rom 8:28, James 1:17). Because God is sovereign, a complaint about our circumstances is a complaint against Him.

4. Needs are an Opportunity for God to Provide


 Matt 6:31-33. **Q.** Why should we not be anxious about our needs? (v32)

 2 Cor 9:1-15. In this passage Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to follow through with a commitment they had made to give financial relief to the Macedonian church.

Q. In v6 he is comparing giving financially to sowing and reaping seed. What will the person who gives little receive? What about the one who gives much?

Q. v8. When we incur a need because of our liberal giving, what is God able to do?

When we have needs it is an opportunity to trust God to provide for us. 2 Cor 9:10-12 indicates that God's provision is fourfold. He provides us with the substance to give to others, he replaces the necessities we may have sacrificed through our giving, he multiplies the effectiveness of our giving, and he uses our giving to bring forth righteousness and thanksgiving in his kingdom. This is the same truth found in Prov 11:24 *There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty.* (see also Prov 19:17, Luke 6:38)

 1 Tim 6:17-18. **Q.** How did Paul tell Timothy he should warn the rich?

Q. What *should* they trust in? _____

Q. According to v18, what should they be ready to do?

Whereas needs are an opportunity to trust and rely upon God's provision, a lack of want often causes us to forget God and trust in our own riches.

 Rev 3:16-17. **Q.** What attitude did the riches of the Laodicean church create?

Q. How did Christ feel about this church?

Instead of being anxious about our needs being met and doing all we can to ensure that we never go without, we should look at trials and needs as opportunities to trust God and to see him work.

👉 **Discuss.** How might having a need end up being a greater blessing than having everything we want?

5. Christ is the Source of Continual Contentment

We started this study by considering the example of the Apostle Paul and his contentment in all sorts of circumstances. He learned to be content when he had much and when he had little. **Q.** According to Php 4:13, what was the source and strength of his contentment?

📖 1 Timothy 6:6. **Q.** What, when added to contentment, is great gain? _____

📖 Matthew 6:33. **Q.** After Jesus told us to not be anxious in seeking the fulfillment of our needs, what *did* he tell us to seek?

It is often a lack of godliness and righteousness that causes us to look to the world for satisfaction. In contrast, true contentment comes only through a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ. When our focus is right and we seek the righteousness of God above all else, the material things of this world will tend to lose their luster.

👉 **Discuss.** How might God go about teaching us that true contentment comes only through a right relationship with Jesus Christ?

Now, having considered that *stuff does not produce satisfaction*, that *wants are not needs*, that *all we have comes from God*, that *needs are an opportunity for God to provide*, and that *Christ is the source of continual contentment*, let's look at one last principle that will help us to maintain contentment – Others are more important than ourselves.

6. Others are More Important than Ourselves

The covetous man is a self-centered man. His covetousness prevents him from rejoicing when others

are blessed (1 Cor 12:26). Instead of rejoicing when others are blessed he looks at their blessings with envy. He is preoccupied with getting more and better *stuff* and, as a result, overlooks the *needs* of others while indulging in his *wants*.

📖 Philippians 2:3-4. **Q.** How should we view one another?

Q. v4. How will valuing others above ourselves change our view of material goods?

📖 1 Cor 10:24. **Q.** What should we seek? In contrast to what?

📖 1 Cor 13:4-5. **Q.** What are we expressing when we seek the well being of others?

Discontentment with our own circumstances will make it very difficult to give to others. In fact, according to 1 Cor 13, our self-centered approach to material goods is *unloving*. It puts ourselves first and other's last which is the exact opposite of the example which Christ left us (Php 2:5-11).

Stuff does not produce satisfaction, Wants are not needs, All that we have comes from God, Needs are an opportunity for God to provide, Christ is the source of continual contentment, and Others are more important than ourselves. Next time you find yourself discontent with your circumstances consider which of these principles you have forgotten!

Review

1. It is not uncommon for depression or trauma to drive people to compulsive shopping or hoarding. Why do you think this is the case?
 - a. Why will they never be satisfied?
2. How can we maintain a right attitude toward material things next time the latest electronics or fashion catches our eye?
3. How might an understanding that all that we have comes from God help us to cope with needs or trials?
4. All sin is dissatisfaction with God, yet God is the source of all blessings. How can we become more satisfied with Him?
5. How does contentment with our circumstances enable us to be more giving to others?