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The Path to Contentment

Our world entices and pressures us to want more, do more, have more. The idea of being content is either foreign or demeaned as settling, missing out, not measuring up. That doesn't line up with what God thinks, and tells us.

The New Testament word has the ideas of being adequate, sufficient, not being dependent on others or circumstances. One contemporary dictionary defines it as a feeling of being happy or satisfied. Another one describes it as the state of being mentally or emotionally satisfied with things as they are.



The apostle Paul wrote, “godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment” (1 Timothy 6:6). Paul was writing about true contentment that comes from God. The question is, “How can we find and enjoy it? What is the path to this contentment?” In Philippians chapter 4 we find the path to contentment, five stepping stones to being content.

The first stepping stone is realizing that becoming content is a process. Paul testifies, “I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am” (11). In the next verse he tells us, “I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.” We need to realize that becoming content is a process as we walk with God through the good and easy times and also the bad and tough times.

The second stepping stone is to make sure we go to the right source for contentment. Paul tells us, “I can do all things through [Christ] who strengthens me” (13), and “my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (19). This is so basic that we might ask if it has to be mentioned. Basic, yes, but do we actually do it? We can run to God with our needs and desires, stress about what we don't have, but do we run to God asking, “Teach me to be content”?

The third stepping stone is seeing material things from God's perspective. As Paul wraps up his letter to the Philippian church he thanks them for their financial support. Verse 17, “Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek the profit which increases to your account.” Their financial gifts were important, but his focus was not on the money but on the spiritual work for God which increases and pays everlasting dividends. King David prayed “Yours, LORD, is the greatness, the power, the

glory, the victory, and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and on the earth”, and again, “everything is Yours” (1 Chronicles 29:11, 16). It all belongs to God. Jesus tells us “not even when one is affluent does his life consist of his possessions” (Luke 12:15). Remember the principle of zero in and zero out. As Paul wrote to Timothy, “we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either” (1 Timothy 6:7). We are to use material things as God’s stewards to provide for our needs, the needs of others and for treasure in heaven.

Stepping stone number 4 on the path to contentment is to view people as God does. Back in Philippians chapter 4, in verse 10 Paul told the Philippian believers, “I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked an opportunity to act.” He went on to remind them of their giving to support the work and how valuable it was. He saw them as God did—he rejoiced, he gave praise to God for them and their generosity. In chapter 1 he told them whenever he thought of them he was thankful, whenever he prayed for them he was joyful, wherever he was they were in his heart, he was confident that God would complete what He started in them, he shared a true partnership with them and he prayed for them to bring glory and praise to God. We also must see others as God sees them if we want to be content.

The fifth stepping stone to God’s contentment is seeing our circumstances from God’s perspective. Paul shares being content in a broad range of experiences.

“Not that I speak from need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with little, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need” (11-12).

Knowing the number one drive in his life was not to have his needs met was critical to Paul being content. His needs, like ours, were important, but they were not his most important focus, and they should not be our number one focus. Our most important focus is doing all to the glory of God. Being content does not exclude trying to change your circumstances. As it has often been said, Paul was content *in* all things, but not *with* all things.

God has provided the path and means to being content, the path and means for you to be content. What was true for Paul is true for you, “[you] can do all things through [Christ] who strengthens [you]” (13). By God’s grace, you can be content.

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