

## Daily Godly Living Being Content in My Circumstances

**Intro: There seems so much in this world to cause discontentment. As my preaching colleague Phil Morgan recently put it:**

“You work hard and try to do right, but never seem to get ahead. With one kid in high school and another getting ready for college, the transmission goes out in the car – about the same time the water heater has to be replaced, and the factory is threatening layoffs.

Bosses and coaches play favorites, politicians disappoint, taxes go up and benefits go down. Godly people get cancer and are struck down in the prime of life while others laugh in the face of God, live long and prosper, and are honored in death. The slow car drives in the fast lane, children don’t grow up to live as they were taught, and old age brings fears, pain and difficult decisions.

And just as outrage begins to set in about this imperfect world, we look in the mirror and see someone looking back at us who is, we must admit, *also very imperfect!* We speak harshly and hurt those we love. We know about the “ideal life” but fail to sustain it for very long at a time. And then one day we realize that life has not become all that we had hoped for it, and we must deal with painful and unchangeable disappointments.”

**Did you ever feel that way? Probably everyone has; but the more important question is, “How are we supposed to deal with this imperfect world?” With so much messed up, is there a way to find “contentment” in the midst of these storms? Listen to Paul’s answer in his epistle to the Philippians:**

*But 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 opportunity. Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.*  
(Philippians 4:10-11)

**Paul shows us that we can have an inner satisfaction and peace when life is tough. The Greek expression he used for contentment meant to be “self-sufficient”, that is, not dependent upon what someone else would supply.**

**He shows us that contentment is not something that comes to us naturally; it must be “learned”.**

**The question is, “What must we learn in order to experience this contentment in our circumstances?” We must:**

### **Learn to accept what cannot be changed**

**Ecclesiastes doesn’t usually seem to be the place to turn to learn how to be content. The writer appears at times to express even a discontented frustration with this world.**

*“Vanity of vanities! All is vanity” (Eccl. 1:2)*

Yet, he follows his descriptions of life’s vanity with a faith response in which he stress three important truths:

All the events of life (both good and bad) are here by divine appointment: *There is an appointed time for everything (Eccl. 3:1)*

All of these events are an integral part of God’s plan: *He has made everything appropriate in its time. (Ecclesiastes 3:11)*

None of these events can be removed; but all together serve God’s ultimate purpose that we learn to fear and obey Him: *I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him. (Ecclesiastes 3:14)*

**His point: Life proceeds under a divine providence that cannot be ultimately altered—accept it!**

Like Solomon we may approach life with our own agenda; we think that we can plan, organize, and orchestrate our destiny the way we want it. However, the writer of Ecclesiastes urges us instead to accept God’s agenda.

Fulfillment and contentment cannot come if we are constantly arguing with life.

*“Frustration is an adult form of a child’s temper tantrum.”*

*“Discontent is the penalty we must pay for being ungrateful for what we have”*

Instead of fighting and being frustrated at the unchangeable things of life, the right way to live is to accept the harmony of God’s order—to accept God’s overarching purpose and find our place in it with patience and gratitude!

### **Learn to differentiate between real needs and greedy wants**

**Most of our discontentment may be rooted in letting others dictate to us what we “need” rather than letting God define what we need.**

Madison Avenue works incessantly to convince us all that what they have to offer is what we need (and deserve!). If we listen too often and too long we develop distorted conceptions of what is really necessary.

**Paul could see real dangers for those who could not make this distinction:**

*But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang. (1 Timothy 6:6-10)*

*But godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. (1 Timothy 6:6-8)*

**So then we can learn contentment if we will define our needs realistically and acknowledge God's provision for them. Contentment is not achieved by gaining more, but by learning to desire less.**

### **Learn to trust our future security to God**

**Our present discontentment is often the result of fearing the future. The Hebrew writer's exhortation makes clear that contentment does not come from accumulating more now but trusting God more.**

*Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you," so that we confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5-6)*

When we learn to confidently trust that God will not forsake us and will be a great and capable Helper in every fearful moment then we will have discovered the way to contentment.

**What peace and sufficiency this can give us to know that God will take care of us. The future of the faithful is secure!**

### **Learn to see the value of the spiritual over the material**

Socrates used to wander through the marketplace and among the stalls of the bazaars in ancient Athens asking the merchants and the consumers the same question, "Where can we buy the things which are really necessary for life?" The point of that question was to call attention to the fact that life's necessities were not the commodities traded at the market place. What Socrates hinted at, Jesus clearly stated:

*"Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions. (Luke 12:15)*

We often lack contentment because we value the wrong things! Why should we settle for trinkets when we can have the rich gifts of God's grace?

The real fullness is the one Jesus spoke about in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; for they shall be filled".

The real treasure is the one we lay up in heaven! (Mt. 6:19-21)

The real life is the one that we will embrace in eternity (1 Tim. 6:19)

But what about the parts of life that are unfair and unjust?

### **Learn to trust in God's justice in dealing with life's inequities**

It is of course always tempting to see the wicked in their prosperity and feel discontentment at our lot in life. But listen carefully to the psalmist's words in addressing this issue:

*Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who carries out wicked schemes. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret, it leads only to evildoing. For evildoers will be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord, they will inherit the land. Yet a little while and the wicked*

*man will be no more; and you will look carefully for his place, and he will not be there. But the humble will inherit the land, and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity. (Psalm 37:7-11)*

What enables the righteous person to be content when life is unfair is that there is a righteous judge to which all will answer. Justice will be done, if not in this life, in the life to come.

Now let's come back to the passage from which we started this discussion and learn a secret from the Apostle Paul.

**Learn to depend upon God's power to face whatever life brings**

Paul had experienced the full range of material conditions; yet in spite of enjoying the extremes of both being filled and going hungry, he had learned the secret of contentment. The source of his sufficiency was what he already had!—Jesus!

*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:10-13)*

**Conclusion: With God's help we can learn to be content with our circumstances and with that contentment our godliness is "great gain".**