

First Light

What do you think of when you hear the word contentment? Calm, quiet times of meditation? Rubbing a golden retriever behind the ears? Having everything you need? Passive resignation? Laziness? Seems like there may be some confusion about what being content really looks like. Try this: A state of general happiness, acceptance, and satisfaction in the midst of current circumstances. Next question: What is a guy to do when our culture is always promoting ways to get more, be better, buy bigger, or upgrade? Actually, it's easy to be a little bit discontented. But is it possible that contentment isn't really a problem of moving up as much as it is a problem of moving in – considering where I am allowing my sense of worth to be forged. It may not be so much about having less stuff as it is about being completed without stuff.

And maybe it is more about who I am trying to be in order to match the world around me. Think of it like this: If the man that I want you to think that I am is able to conceal the man I actually am, I will always have to exceed the image you saw last so I can continue to be the man I hope you'd see that I am... did that make sense? It's about image, it's about heart, and it's about comparisons - that little issue with the proverbial Jones's. Whether it's with Facebook, Instagram, office gossip, or mirror-gazing, contentment is not the most popular virtue to have because all of these platforms foster the game of comparison. In the Christian reality taught and modeled by Jesus, contentment and comparison are frequent opponents in the battle for the human heart.

It is such a critical topic that in one of his letters, Paul takes a few minutes to address his education in contentment. Somewhere between describing his top ten terrible experiences to the Corinthian church and arriving at that Roman jail cell where he pens Philippians 4, Paul speaks about his "secret" that helped shape his perception of contentment.

2 Cor. 11:23-28

I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. 24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. 27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. 28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

First Light

Philippians 4:10-13

10 I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. 11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

So, back to the questions.

What area of my life is it the hardest to be content?

Is there an area of my world in which I am content? How does it feel?

Is there a part of my life with which I need to foster contentment for the sake of my soul?

What might become less complicated in my life if I were to be more content?

- Could this have a positive effect on my faith? My family? My church? My neighbors?