

The Habits of Happiness

Learn To Be Content

Part 8

Intro: Would you consider yourself habitually content or habitually dissatisfied? Maybe you should ask the person sitting next to you? In reality, we're all probably a mixture of both at times. BUT, something is happening in our culture over the past 25 years.

- There has been a steady decline in people's overall contentment. We are not getting happier / more fulfilled / more content. In fact, the opposite is happening.

Wouldn't it be nice if we all could just learn to be content? Paul says we can. This is our last habit of happiness.

Phil. 4:10-13 "How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but you didn't have the chance to help me. ¹¹ **Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have.** ¹² I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. **I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little.** ¹³ For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength." (NLT) Here Paul writes from prison talking about learning to be content with whatever! Content even in a Roman prison. Here's a habit worth learning.

How can I make contentment a habit?

1. Contentment Must Be Learned

I have learned how to be content (He uses the word "learned" twice.)

Experiencing contentment in life is something that we have to learn; it does NOT come naturally. What comes naturally is just the opposite. We naturally feel stress / frustration / anger / unrest / unhappiness / fear / insecurities

Illustrate: We're born into this world unhappy – crying – screaming – confused – and for the rest of our lives we're learning how to be content.

HOW? What does it take to become a learner?

- Learning is intentional
Learning doesn't happen by osmosis. We just don't naturally become happy. We can't simply wait for the winds of happiness to blow over us. If we desire consistent contentment, we must decide to be intentional at learning what this takes. Reject the myth that happiness finds you. You and I must learn to be content in the way God says we can discover it. (Ask God to help you learn)
- Learning requires motivation
It takes motivation to learn. Lazy people are not content. So many people seem to be waiting around for the escalator to take them to the summit of contentment. There is no free ride to happiness. We must find the motivation to make some hard choices.

Learning is hard work that has an amazing payoff. We must reject the idea that discovering contentment is easy. (Ask God to give you motivation and desire.)

- Learning requires evaluation

We can't learn successfully without consistent evaluation. It amazes me how rarely we evaluate how we feel and why we feel this way. Have you ever asked yourself; "Why am I so unhappy?" "Why do I feel the way I do?" Emotions should not be the driving force of our lives, but they are indicators. They can be the warning lights on our dashboard that tells us to check something. Ignore the warning lights, and you just might get emotionally stranded on the side of the road. If you're not experiencing contentment, don't automatically assume it's your spouse's fault / jobs fault / lack of money. Stop settling for quick, shallow answers. Evaluation has to go deeper than this.

- Our culture is training us to be shallow – Social media is training us to have short attention spans. We want everything in 90 seconds – explain neuroscience...
- For example: Evaluate how you think. It's easy to develop negative thinking patterns that become ingrained and automatic - explain

- Learning requires time

No one learns everything they need instantly. Learning how to be content takes time as well. I'm still learning how to walk in contentment. WHY? Because life changes / circumstances change / stress levels change / painful events happen – With each new situation in my life I have another opportunity to discover how to experience contentment in Jesus. I feel like I am constantly re-learning old lessons spiritually...only deeper.

- Learning requires examples

Whatever I'm trying to learn I need people who are successfully doing this. I need flesh and blood models of what I want to experience. If you want to learn contentment, stop hanging out so much with grumpy, discontented people. I need people in my life who help me grow. Find contented people and learn from them.

- There are so many people at Foothills who are walking through very dark and painful life circumstances. Right now, I'm thinking of several people who have cancer. Their attitudes right now inspire me. I'm learning from them. (Explain)

Phil. 3:17 "Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do." (NIV) We need to keep our eyes on the people who are living the things we want to experience. (Provides motivation / inspiration)

- Learning requires change

We never truly learn something until we make changes in our lives. No one will learn contentment continuing to do the same things you're currently doing. If you're unhappy, you're living in a way that is making you unhappy.

- Example: Lisa gone – fishing trip cancelled – home alone agitated - explain

Are you learning contentment, or are you just waiting for it to happen to you?

2. Contentment Is Not Based Upon Circumstances

I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. ¹² I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little.

- Let's remember where Paul is. He is in a Roman dungeon. Yet, even in these horrible circumstances he is experiencing contentment. If we base our contentment in this life solely on circumstances, we are setting ourselves up for tremendous disappointment. WHY?
- Circumstantial contentment is fragile
It's fragile because the circumstances can change instantly. Good situations can break...they are delicate. **Illustrate:** As a youth pastor, we used to play this game where we tied a balloon to each foot and then every kid would try to step on the other players balloons. Last balloon standing wins. Circumstantial contentment is like this. It's fragile so you're stressed out trying to protect your balloon...good circumstances.
- Circumstantial contentment is temporary
We all know this to be true. This is why when things are really good, we say things like; "I wonder when something bad is going to happen." This isn't being pessimistic. It's living in reality. We know that good circumstances don't last indefinitely. When we have the expectations that good circumstances should last forever, we set ourselves up for great disappointment. Some of you get so upset when something difficult happens in your life. It's as if you have an expectation things should be perfect all the time.
- Circumstantial contentment is unpredictable (Remember COVID?)
No matter how much we try to control the circumstances in our lives, there is always a high level of unpredictability. You can take great care of your health, but something can happen. You can have tremendous planning for your future retirement, but the Market can take a turn. You can plan for your kids and their future, but they may decide to choose a different course. Because of the unpredictable nature of circumstances, we experience stress and disappointment instead of contentment. The more we seek to control circumstances, the more stress we usually experience. This is why Jesus said: *Matt. 6:27 "Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?" (NLT)* In fact, science has shown us that worry does just the opposite. It shortens our lives.
- Circumstantial contentment alone is hopeless
Because we live in a broken, fallen world. Adverse circumstances are just going to happen. It's not IF...It's when. Every week I have the privilege of reading through the prayer requests. The amount of pain represented by the prayer requests I see weekly is sometimes staggering and overwhelming. (diseases / sicknesses / surgeries / broken relationships / divorces / addictions / enormous stress and anxiety / people losing their homes / job losses / marital struggles / parenting struggles / I love the honesty, but it's

overwhelming at times. We desperately need more hope than what circumstances can bring us. Sometimes we go through seasons of difficult circumstances.

II Cor. 4:8-9 "We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. ⁹ We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed." (NLT)

If our contentment in this life is connected to circumstances, our emotions are going to be all over the map. We're going to experience much more disappointment in this life rather than contentment. Basing your happiness on circumstances is the fast track to unhappiness. There has to be a better way.

3. Contentment Is Empowered by Jesus

For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.

For many believers in Jesus, this is their favorite verse. Do you realize this verse was written in the context of experiencing contentment? We can tap into the strength of Jesus and actually learn how to be content no matter what? Contentment even when you feel like life is a prison? HOW? (Without this being a cliché.)

- Jesus is the source of contentment

We must go to the right source. We have to come to understand that the source of our contentment is Jesus. As much as we hope for favorable circumstances, we must have a more secure source for contentment in this world. We need a source that is constant, unchanging, secure and never ending. This is what Jesus was trying to explain to a woman at a well one day. (Share story)

John 4:13-14 "Jesus replied, "Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. ¹⁴ But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life." (NLT)

- Contentment is Relational not merely rational

What do I mean? Our contentment is not simply a cognitive exercise.

- Of course changing how we think is an essential part of the process. Sometimes we have created deep negative thinking patterns that sabotage our contentment - explain

BUT...You can't think your way into contentment. WHY? Because Paul says that this contentment is something that goes beyond rational understanding.

Phil. 4:7 "Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand..." (NLT) It's the result of relationship. It's the result of connection.

It's the result of oneness with Jesus. Contentment is connected to a Person and that Person is Jesus. We spend way too much time trying to change our circumstances rather than learning how to be content in our circumstances? WHY? Because we believe our happiness is connected to circumstances. We think it is merely a rational process instead of a relational connection.

- For example: How do you feel when you're with your best friend? OR your people? The ones who know and love you unconditionally? Content! There is a safety and a connection that impacts you mentally and emotionally.
- It works like this with our relationship with Jesus. (He's IN us.)

➤ Contentment is Relational not remedy

I know we all beg God to change our painful circumstances. I'm not saying we stop asking God to do so. BUT the peace and contentment that is promised is not connected to a remedy. It's not connected to a change in our circumstances. Remember, Paul was still in a dungeon. His contentment came from the fact Jesus was in the dungeon with Him. It's easy to be so focused on asking God to change something in our lives that we miss connecting with Him entirely. Since contentment is discovered relationally, we should spend more time connecting with Jesus rather than asking Him to remedy our situation.

- If you are in the midst of some painful, difficult circumstances, why not ask God to be enough for you. Instead of only asking God to change the situation you're in, how about asking God to change you?

*Phil. 4:19 "And this same God who takes care of me will **supply all your needs** from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus."* (NLT) "All your needs" includes emotional needs / relational needs / spiritual needs / - NOT only physical.

- Jesus empowers progress not perfection

➤ Growth is messy

Just because you don't feel content today or tomorrow, doesn't mean you're not growing. Remember contentment is a learned skill. It doesn't come naturally to us. Even Paul said he had to learn contentment.

- Being unhappy does not mean you are a bad person, or a lousy Christian. It means you're human and trying to learn how to be content despite the circumstances in your life.
- Let me be transparent for a moment. During the past few years, I have personally struggled with contentment more than any other time in my life. There has not been any one single event that has brought this about. It has been a series of complex, painful circumstances over time. Life can create an accumulative effect on the heart, mind and emotions.
- Then one day you realize you've lost your joy, your satisfaction, your contentment. You also realize there is no easy or quick path back. It's time to grow again and the old lessons are not enough for the current situation. Therefore, I can stay stuck or I can embrace the messiness of growth again.

➤ Growth is a journey

God loves processes. God is more concerned what we are learning through the process than the final result. We get so focused on the end result we feel like failures through the process. (Because we haven't achieved the result)

- We forget in order to get the final result there are a multitude of lessons to be learned along the way. Growth is a journey. That's why contentment is a journey to experience not a problem to be fixed. If you embrace the journey and the lessons to discover along the way, you will experience more contentment.
- You and I are here to learn how to be content. That means we will not be content every day because we are still learning. You're longing for contentment is simply a reminder there is still work to be done, lessons to learn and more miles ahead to travel.
- Sometimes our dissatisfaction is simply a longing for where our true home is...eternity. We long for what we were created for and we're not there yet.

How are you embracing your own journey of learning to be content?