

LIFESAVERS

A Life Group of the Tusculum Church of Christ
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The 2007-2008 LifeSavers "Homebuilders" Study Series

"Empty Yourself"

Can you honestly claim contentment? Are you as content in times of need as you are in times of plenty? Do you take you concerns to the Father in prayer and leave them there, or do you carry your needs around with you until they become heavy, burdensome worries? I would like to challenge you to thinking deeply about contentment. I would like to challenge you to intentionally begin taking you concerns to the Father in prayer and thanking him for all of the blessings we already have! We are a blessed people.

"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.... follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called." (I Timothy 5:6-8, 11-12)

**"Into Your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD God of truth."
(Psalm 31:5)**

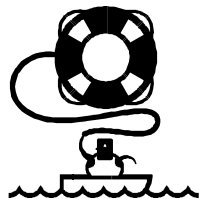
So often contentment eludes us as we live our lives from day to day. Our focus is often on such lofty thoughts as our heart's dreams for the future — a husband and wife, perhaps, and a family — or on the more mundane things of life like buying that new outfit we saw at the Mall, or upgrading our two-year-old computer system. Sometimes we get caught up in building up our own businesses or climbing the corporate ladder — making a name for ourselves and creating a nice padding for our bank account.

But inevitably focusing on any of these things brings discontentment. When Paul wrote to Timothy, a young man with all the hopes and dreams of any young man, he reminded him that if he has food to eat, and clothes to cover his body, that he should be content with that. But he writes this within the context of many other instructions for a young person who is committed first and foremost to serving God, and it is a letter that would be good for us to read often. Just a few sentences beyond the reminder to be content, Paul tells Timothy what things he should pursue in place of these earthly things: righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience and meekness — all part of "laying hold on eternal life".

Eternal life in the presence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ — therein lies all the fulfillment of our dreams and aspirations as human beings. Satan would have us believe that fulfillment lies in earthly things and relationships, such as making lots of money, getting married, and having that nice big home with the latest and most convenient furnishings. But reality is that we will take none of these things with us when we leave this earth for eternity. When we focus on what matters in our preparation for eternal life with the Lord, and in preparing those around us for eternity, it becomes much easier to be obedient in being content with what God has already provided us.

"After the game, the king and the pawn go into the same box." ~Italian Proverb





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Most of us have many more earthly things than just enough food to eat and clothes to cover us, and yet it seems we often fight discontentment. No doubt this will be an ongoing battle throughout our lives, for it seems to be our enemy's primary ploy to get us off course as Christians. His very first "trick" was causing Eve to be discontent with all the wonderful things she had in the Garden of Eden, by getting her to focus on that one thing which she didn't have. If we don't recognize this ploy when he uses it on us, it becomes way too easy to go out and try to grasp what we think will bring us contentment and fulfillment, even though it is currently outside of God's will for us, just as Eve did, and of course have disastrous results, just as she did.

"Godliness with contentment is great gain." Great gain — for ourselves, for eternity, and most of all for our Lord and His Kingdom, of whom we are His soldiers:

Contentment is not a relinquishing of the natural drive we all have to succeed in life and/or career. In other words, contentment is not about becoming lazy, slothful, or dormant; it is not about being underachieving slackers who fool themselves into believing that being so is actually righteous and peaceful. No! Contentment is not about killing future hopes and dreams; it's not about being complacent about the important things in life either. Contentment is about embracing the present moment we all actually live in. It's about embracing the people, places, and good things we have been given right now. In fact, we cannot move into our future's creativity and dreams until we authentically embrace our present.

We all have much in life that we still want to experience and accomplish. That is a good thing! We all have dreams and desires that span everything from school, marriage, and vocation. Those are good things too.

Deep contentment does not mean we stop dreaming; deep contentment means that we embrace what we already have. Deep contentment means that we keep dreaming big dreams, while we simultaneously embrace all that we have right now with gratitude and thanksgiving.

“Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done ...” (Philippians 4:6)

Worry. How much do we worry today! We have so much to worry about, don't we? We worry about terrorism, unemployment, the opinions of others, our children, our houses, and weather or not we'll find that special person with whom we can spend the rest of our lives. We worry about things that are beyond our control.

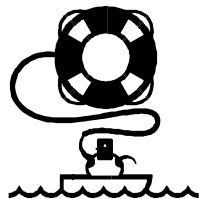
What does worrying get us? What does it accomplish, really?

Our excessive worrying does not accomplish a thing. Does this mean we should not be concerned about various things? No! Paul says when you are concerned, rather than vainly worrying, pray about it! Instead of worrying take your concerns to God in prayer.

Jesus is even more graphic. He says “Look at these lilies in the field. They neither spin, nor toil. Yet, God has adorned them with such splendor that not even Solomon's temple compares. How much more important are we in our Father's eyes than these simple lilies?”

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Worrying, spinning, and toiling accomplish nothing. Take your concerns to the Father. There you will find contentment.

“How grateful I am, and how I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but for a while you didn’t have the chance to help me. Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to get along happily whether I have much or little. 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. For I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need.” (Philippians 4:10-13)

Paul obviously has never heard of this “prosperity Gospel” that sells so well on popular Christian TV. Why do I say so? Because there are obvious times when Paul has much and there are times when he has very little. He says so himself in this portion of verses. There is a huge lesson in there for us too! You see for Paul, contentment is not about having much or having little; he experienced both over the course of his life. Contentment was, for Paul, about being at peace in times of plenty and times of great need. It’s about being thankful in whatever moment we are living in at any given time.

I’m worried for the Church in America. I honestly think we have set ourselves up for a disaster of major proportions. The way we do church is so fused to “having much” that I’m not sure we still know how to be content in those great times of need.

We need to understand that in the Gospel we have all that we need to be content in times of plenty and in times of need. Contentment is not limited to times of plenty. Is it? No! Paul was content in great times of need too.

“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. Now glory be to God our Father forever and ever.” (Philippians 4:19-20)

Paul always has a point to his musings. “Look at me,” he says. “Do you see how I am content whether I have much or little? I’m content because God is taking care of me. This same God who cares for me, and gives me strength, peace, and contentment, will do the same thing for all of you!”

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