

## Week 5: Contentment in Need and in Plenty

NCAC Adult Sunday School

October 8, 2023

## THE TREASURE OF CONTENTMENT

**Course Goal:** To better understand and more consistently display Christian contentment so that God is glorified, we become more joyful, and we are an encouragement and inspiration to others.

*"...for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. <sup>12</sup> I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. <sup>13</sup> I can do all things through him who strengthens me." (Phil. 4:10-13)*

Jeremiah Burroughs defines Christian contentment as "that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal at every condition."

**What have we learned so far about why contentment is worth fighting for?**

### HOW DO WE FIGHT FOR CHRISTIAN CONTENTMENT IN TIMES OF HARDSHIP?

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"There is no time in a Christian's weary and painful pilgrimage to heaven when contentment is so precious and yet so hard to come by as during times of suffering. And the greater the suffering, the more this divine and supernatural contentment will be vital to our souls, glorifying to God, and fruitful in eternity." (Davis, *The Power of Christian Contentment*, pp. 129-130).

**Why is it so hard to be content in the midst of suffering and hardship?**

**Why is Christian contentment in the midst of suffering so glorifying to God?**

Prior to becoming a Christian, John Wesley once sailed on a ship along with a group of Moravian Christians who were engaged in a worship service when that ship encountered a violent storm. Wesley later wrote this about his observation of Christian contentment in the midst of that storm:

*"In the midst of the psalm wherewith their service began, the sea broke over, split the main-sail in pieces, covered the ship, and poured in between the decks, as if the great deep had already swallowed us up. A terrible screaming began among the [sailors]. The [Moravians] calmly sung on. I asked one of them afterwards, 'Were you not afraid?' He answered, 'I thank God, no.' I asked, 'But were not your women and children afraid?'" He replied, mildly, 'No; our women and children are not afraid to die.' From them I went to the crying, trembling [sailors], and pointed out to them the difference in the hour of trial, between him that feareth God, and him that feareth him not."*

**1. Ask for wisdom.** Sometimes we may not see the purpose in our suffering until after the fact. But our suffering is not random; God has a specific plan for our suffering and will use it for our good.

*<sup>2</sup>Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, <sup>3</sup>for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. <sup>4</sup>And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. <sup>5</sup>If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. (James 1:2-5)*

**What does James tell us to do when we encounter hardship? Why?**

**2. Rest in God's goodness.** There is great comfort to be found in knowing God is always good and is always working for our good, even if it does not always appear that way to us.

*<sup>20</sup>As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. <sup>21</sup>So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.' Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them." (Joseph, in Genesis 50:20-21)*

**How did Joseph's trust in God's wisdom and goodness affect his disposition toward injustice?**

**3. Expect suffering.** There will come a day when all mourning, crying, and pain will have passed. But, we're not there yet! We live in a broken world and should not be surprised when suffering comes.

*"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)*

**Why does Jesus want us to expect tribulation? How does He want us to respond in those times?**

**4. Acknowledge our limited perspective.** We cannot possibly know all that God is doing or how He is working all things for good. For now, we must trust in God's character, while anticipating that one day in heaven He may show us His wonderful handiwork through the ages of time.

*"Jesus answered him, 'What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.'" (John 13:7)*

**What are examples of times we are willing to endure pain because we know it will result in good?**

**5. Accept that suffering can sanctify.** God often uses suffering to teach us Christ-likeness.

*"Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame,*

*because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." (Romans 5:3-5)*

**How have you seen hardship or suffering produce good in you or in others?**

**6. Anticipate our future glory.** Contentment in the midst of hardships will reap eternal rewards, and responding to suffering with a humble, submissive heart will enhance our eternal glory!

*"For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." (2 Corin. 4:17-18)*

**What do you find helps you "look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen"?**

**7. Share hope.** The world is dark with suffering, but the light of Gospel can push back that darkness. As we model hope—and as we speak of that hope!—we shine as lights in a world that needs Christ.

*"Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world..." (Philippians 2:14-15a)*

**What does it take in order for us to "shine as lights in the world"?**

## **HOW DO WE FIGHT FOR CHRISTIAN CONTENTMENT IN TIMES OF ABUNDANCE?**

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"In the wake of the Reformation, many in the European nations and America grew stunningly prosperous while maintaining a strong Christian piety. In the New World, the 'Protestant work ethic' combined with remarkable providential blessings to produce staggering levels of wealth such as most Christians around the world could scarcely dream of. But with that wealth came a very high cost in their spiritual lives. New England Puritan leader Cotton Mather put it this way: 'Religion begat prosperity, and the daughter devoured the mother.'

"American evangelicals of the twenty-first century are the wealthiest Christians in the history of the church. According to one study, evangelicals worldwide collectively made \$7 trillion in income for that year. The Christian income in America represents nearly half of the world's total Christian income. That is a massively weighty responsibility for American Christians." (Davis, *The Power of Christian Contentment*, p. 157).

**In what ways might wealth have the potential to negatively impact our spiritual lives?**

## **Paul's instructions to Timothy regarding those who have all they need—and more:**

*<sup>17</sup> As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. <sup>18</sup> They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, <sup>19</sup> thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life. (1 Timothy 6:17-19).*

**1. Strive for humility.** In verse 17 Paul tells Timothy to charge the rich “*not to be haughty.*” Contentment starts with humility, and wealth can make us proud.

**How can we strive for humility in the midst of prosperity, abundance, or plenty?**

**2. Do not set our hopes on our wealth.** Paul also calls Timothy to challenge those who have plenty to not “*set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches.*”

**What makes it so easy to set our hope on our riches?**

**3. Continue to trust in God above all else.** Paul wants Timothy to encourage everyone to learn to set their hopes “*on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.*”

**How can we ensure that we set our hopes on God when things are going well for us?**

**4. Use our resources to serve God and others.** Paul says in verse 18 that those who have all they need are “*to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share.*”

**How will doing this foster a sense of Christian contentment in us?**

## **FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION**

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**What are some areas of your life where things are *not* going as well as you would like them to? How could you strive for contentment in these areas in a way that glorifies God, brings you joy, and serves as an example to others of Christ's magnificent worth?**

**What are some areas of your life where things *are* going particularly well? What can you do to ensure that your contentment in these areas results in God being honored?**