

Compare and die

Paul wrote in Philippians 4:11—"I learned to be content in that in which I am."

I have italicized the second "I," because I believe it to be the key to the "how to" of this passage. How do we learn contentment? Two ways:

- ▶ Stop comparing ourselves to other people
- ▶ Stop comparing our circumstances to other people's circumstances

It's not always good advice to be self-attuned, but in this case it is. Your life is *your* life, not someone else's. God is putting *you* through things that others



aren't called upon to face. Does this mean that God hates you and likes these other people? Hardly. In fact, it's the other way around. Hebrews, chapter 12, tells us that God disciplines those He loves. Today, discipline is a sign of God's favor, not His displeasure. It's not that He hates those He's not disciplining; it's simply not His time to bring them near. As hard as this is to fathom, it is discipline that brings us near to God.

We're not fatalists, so of course we work to change and better our circumstances. But while working to do this (SEE GRAPHIC AT RIGHT), we remain content. For this, we need only italicize the last word of our key passage, like this: "I learned to be content in that in which I *am*."

There you are, centered smack dab in the middle of God.



Martin Zender's Clanging Gong News

"If I know all mysteries and all knowledge, but have no love, I am a clanging gong" --1 Cor. 13:1-2



Two out of three isn't bad.

Why is contentment so hard?

Living as we do in the midst of an evil eon, contentment comes hard. I'm even wondering if it's our natural disposition. Otherwise, the apostle Paul would not have admitted that he, himself, had to learn it. Philippians 4:11—"I *learned* to be content in that which I am."

The Greek word translated "content" is *autarkes*. It's a two-part Greek word whose English elements are SAME-SUFFICIENT. In other words, whether he was wading through a swamp, napping under a fig tree, running for his life, or being snatched away to the third heaven, Paul's mental disposition was the same; the man felt at home in his own skin, all the time; God sufficed him. How does a normal person tap into this dispositional sweet spot without inhaling illegal drugs?

To attain this spiritual state of mind, it is vital to understand, first of all, that God is operating all in accord with the counsel of His own will (Eph. 1:11); Paul got this revelation directly from the Source. And this: "Now we are aware that God is working all together for the good of those who are loving God, who are called according to [His] purpose..." (Rom. 8:28). In addition, Paul received the following truth: "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor messengers, nor sovereignties, nor the present, nor what is impending, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39).



Paul could not have written Philippians 4:11 without having written and believed these other things. How can one be content if one believes that the human has the power to derail God's plan for his or her life? How can one be content when one considers bad, personal happenings as evidence of God's displeasure?

I believe that Paul wrote Hebrews, and so I attribute the following to his pen as well: "My son, do not disdain the discipline of the Lord, nor yet faint when being exposed by Him. For whom the Lord is loving He is disciplining, Yet He is scourging every son to whom He is assenting.

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Clanging Gong News presents CONTENTMENT 101



"Like this lady, I learned to be content in that in which I am."
—Paul



...contentment

(Continued from page 1)

For discipline are you enduring. As to sons is God bringing it to you.”

Contentment during pain comes from the realization that the One exercising the rod loves you dearly. “For whom the Lord is loving He is disciplining.” When God disciplines, we’re better off after it than before it. “Now all discipline, indeed, for the present is not seeming to be a thing of joy, but of sorrow, yet subsequently it is rendering the peaceable fruit of righteousness” (Heb. 12:11).

There is no more reliable path to contentment during trial than assuring yourself: “God is doing this. When this is done, I will know peaceable fruit. This is working for my good, because *all things* work for my good.”

A female acquaintance recently hospitalized her mother for major heart surgery. While her brothers and sisters fretted in the waiting room, she stayed



cool. She related to me later: “I wasn’t afraid, Martin. I knew God was in control. I knew God loved my mother more than I did. God made the human heart; God formed my mother in the womb and ordered her steps. I felt like I was walking in an aura of warmth, and it followed me wherever I went. “

An aura of warmth that followed me wherever I went. What a picturesque description of the spiritual disposition of Philippians 4:11. ■

Contentment better than money

“Now devoutness with contentment is great capital; for nothing do we carry into the world, and it is evident that neither can we carry anything out” (1 Tim. 6:7).

The world measures us by our bank accounts. If we have lots of money, we’re winners. If we lack money, we’re losers. To keep from being considered losers in the world’s eyes, we work night and day.



What we ought to work on is contentment. And here, I am preaching to myself. Paul considers contentment to be better than money. While money is capital, contentment is “great capital.” It’s not that we shouldn’t have money, but that contentment is better. Money you can’t take with you, but contentment you apparently can.

I wish there were such things as drive-up *contentmeters* at the bank. You put your hand

on a sensor and it reads your contentment level. If you’re content, it deposits a hundred dollars into your account. Excess contentment is worth a grand. If you feel the world has cheated you, better not try the *contentometer*; discontent drains your account faster than three mortgage payments and an electric bill.

Such a system—if only the world knew of it—would surely make one work on one’s contentment. This working on contentment seems to me a much happier enterprise than straining for another greenback.

How do *you* measure wealth? God measures it by contentment. If I have given my family all the material blessings they need, but have failed to impart to them contentment, then I have failed in providing for my family. May God help me.

Henceforth, I will work on contentment. ■

What a Revelation!

OUR CONTENTMENT IS FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS

“Now God is able to lavish all grace on you, that, having all contentment in everything always, you may be superabounding in every good work” (2 Cor. 9:8).

Where did *this* verse come from? I know I’ve read it, but I’ve apparently never gotten its message.

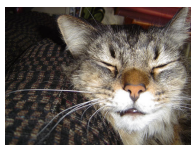
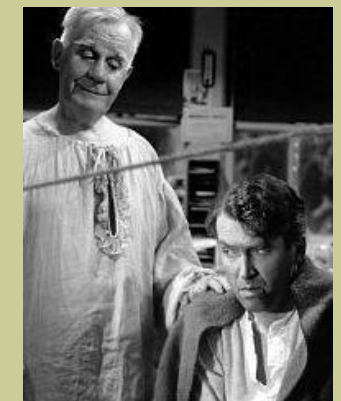
Rather than being an end in itself, contentment frees us to give to others. This is the main point. We are all called to do something in this life to relieve human suffering, but until we become content ourselves, we will never fulfill our mission.

This ought to provide great motivation to seek contentment.

Q&A

Can I make a living and still be content? As Jimmy Stewart says in, *It’s a Wonderful Life*, “Money sure comes in handy down here.”

God expects you to make a living in order to support your family and contribute to worthy causes. But as a believer seeking contentment, you must draw the line between attaining and straining. Paul says in 1 Tim. 6:8— “Now, having sustenance and shelter, with these we shall be sufficed.” Striving for more than you need will compromise your peace. It’s not money that is the root of all evils, but rather the fondness for it (1 Tim. 6:10). Proverbs 17:1 makes the point nicely: “Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it than a house full of feasting with strife.”



“All cats are capitalists.”

—Martin Zender

Rants & Stuff

The Apostle Paul says we should not murmur.
Therefore, I shall rant (Philippians 2:14).

I am, therefore I writhe

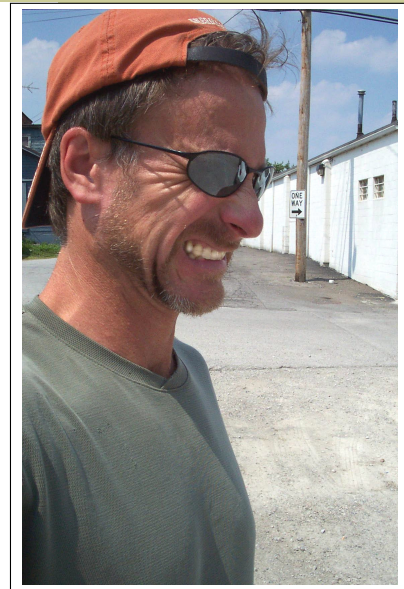
Let your Creator know what is happening to you, even as He disciplines. Why do you writhe? Because there is nothing that relieves. You try to escape your own flesh, but you cannot. It is not yet time for that; your attempts to push it away fail, and so you flail against this inevitability. That's what writhing is. Groans and cries escape your lips. Your oppression pulls you into yourself, like a small gray bug. This pulling, accomplished, is the opposite of

writhing. You would dig yourself into the ground, but no one would find you there. Instinctively knowing this, you fear it.

You call out His name, but He is not there. Thank God now that the scripture verses you read and learned in quieter times light candles for you. The candles self-ignite and flicker apart from your will. They burn throughout the night. Like the sandals of the wandering Jews, the candles miraculously sustain themselves. The warmth from the wicks is little, yet enough to heat your inward parts. It is the dimmest contentment—like the Shekinah glory in the holiest place—yet contentment, still.

No curtain can diffuse it.

It occurs to you then that you are not alone. Other humans crouch like this, suffering. You are related to Adam. No one suffers alone. Only One suffered truly alone:



Christ.

That trial can never be yours. Ever.

His Father attended His writhing at Calvary, but the candles, for Him, went out. The light behind the curtains, for Him, failed. With this, His exhausted frame slipped harder down the cross, burning His back. The sweat dripped from His brow, then burned down His body to His feet.

This was your sin.

You will never experience that. Ever.

Weeping endures for the night, yet joy comes in the morning. This is when you consciously remember God.

In the morning, you escape the tomb to see others for whom Christ died. It is by this avenue—the avenue of others—that God once again shows Himself to be in everything. ■

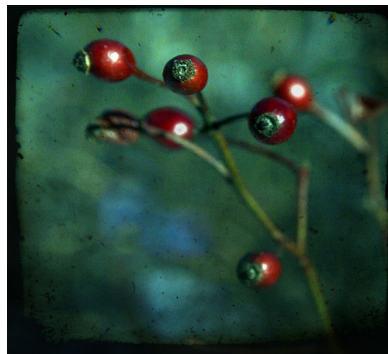


CGN Quote; the blessedness of believing

“The virtue and blessedness of believing is clearly set forth by the apostle Paul. His letters portray its power, his life its stirring triumph. His pen, as no other, has made an indelible impression on the heart and mind of the believer.

“Yet now, apart from law, a righteousness of God is manifest (being attested by the law and the prophets); a righteousness of God, through Jesus Christ's faith” (Rom. 3:21-22).

“A righteousness of God is manifest...Now in very truth and radiant grace, it comes near to the heart of



man. *Jesus Christ's faith*. What a channel for the stream of God's grace. How far beyond our own frail faith. Our righteousness is a broken reed. Of what avail are ethics to give life and peace? There has been but one life, one faith, eminently pleasing to God. He alone could say, ‘I am always doing what is pleasing to Him.’”

—A.E. Knoch, *Volume 34, Unsearchable Riches* magazine