



Second Half Living Presentations

Contentment

Questions for Personal Reflection

1. What aspects of 21st century culture tend to feed discontent in your heart?
2. Do you identify with the struggles that the psalmist expresses in Psalm 73? Are you able to think of specific situations, how you felt and how it was resolved?
3. What part do circumstances play in your experience of contentment; both the major issues and the small daily frustrations? How do you respond when things do not work out according to the script you would have written?
4. Do you agree that contentment can be more elusive in the second half of life? Why do you think that is? What are some of the specific challenges that you face? What are you most thankful for?
5. If Augustine was right when he said “Our hearts are restless until they find our rest in you”, in what ways can you seek contentment in your relationship with God?
6. What might help us gain a greater appreciation of an eternal perspective

Questions for Group Sharing

1. As you reflected, what aspects of 21st century culture tend to feed discontent in your heart?
2. Do difficult circumstances cause you to question the sovereignty, goodness and providence of God in your life?
3. Do you agree that contentment can be more elusive in the second half of life? Why do you think that is? What are some of the specific challenges that you face?
4. What struggles do you have, or anticipate that you may have, with the ageing process?
5. Does regaining and focussing on an eternal perspective as a believer help you in some of these struggles?

Contentment Summary Notes

‘The positive assurance that God has supplied one’s needs and we are therefore released from unnecessary desire’ The New Bible Dictionary.

“Discontent will destroy your peace, rob you of joy, make you miserable and spoil your witness. We dishonour God if we proclaim a saviour that satisfies and then go around discontent”. James Packer

“contentment is like trying to pick up mercury with tweezers.” Richard Swenson

Contentment in the past is no guarantee of continuing contentment in the present.

Philippians 4:12 **Experiencing contentment is not limited to the good times.**

“I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation”.

Contentment can be learned. There is a mystery that needs to be understood. It is not dependent on the circumstances of life that I find myself in

Paul's life events.

Philippians 4: 'well fed or hungry, living in plenty or need' and under house arrest

2 Corinthians 6:4-5; 11:23-29

Yet Paul writes, 'I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation'.

Hebrews 13:5-6 (Amplified) Contentment is keeping my life free to love God with all my heart.

Keeping life free from love of anything is not the denial of reality or ignoring the issues that we face, but the need to place God in the centre of my thoughts and life and to allow God to be God in my life, to be dependent on Him not independent of Him and to rest in the assurance of his promise to never leave us helpless or relax His hold on us.

1 Timothy 6:6-8 Contentment as an extension of a life that pleases God allows us to have a thankful heart for all that He has given us.

Positively cling onto truth, do not be sucked into controversies that cause conflict with others and v9 avoid a wrong drive for wealth that can shipwreck a person's faith.

All three passages Philippians, Hebrews and 1 Timothy mentioned money as a primary source of discontent.

There are many enemies of contentment.

Selfishness, an obsession to stay young and a focus on happiness. (Greg Easterbrook)

"Society is marked by an inextinguishable discontent." Arthur Schlesinger

Internal character traits that are enemies of contentment:

Envy, bitterness, regret, desire for control, a grumbling spirit, hardship and suffering.

Envy!

Proverbs 14:30 "A heart at peace gives life to the body but envy rots the bones".

Psalms 73 Asaph, the author, was a leader of one of David's Levitical choirs

vs2 - 3 describes the vulnerability of his faith and mentions envy as the presenting issue.

vs 4 - 12 observes how he sees people live who have rejected any acknowledgement of God in their lives. They have no struggles; free of care and their bodies are healthy and strong. They go on amassing wealth.

vs13 -14 he compares himself with them and concludes that his own journey of faith has been a waste of time. This envy has produced a crisis of faith.

vs 15-18 is a turning point. "it troubled me deeply".

Verse 17 He did not walk away from God but "entered the sanctuary of God."

vs 18-20. He began to see the culture of the day through the eyes of the Lord and saw the ultimate destiny of those who reject God.

v22. He acknowledges envy had moved him away from God

v23 -24 an expression of contentment. The closeness of the Lord, mentoring of the Lord, a secure eternal future, and even in weakness the strength of the Lord is sufficient.

v 25 is a wonderful summary of contentment, "earth has nothing I desire besides you".

In summary:

- Experiencing contentment is not limited to the good times. It is not determined by our circumstances. Paul refers to contentment in the 'any and every' circumstance of life. The good and the not so good.
- Contentment is keeping my life free to love God with all my heart because we have surrendered all other possibilities of satisfaction. The writer to the Hebrews encourages us to keep our lives free of anything that would cause us to be dis-satisfied and deny God's care and involvement in our lives.
- Contentment is seen in a life that pleases God that allows us to have a thankful heart for all that He has given us.
- Contentment comes, as Asaph discovered, when we see ours and others lives through the eyes of God – an eternal perspective.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 encourages us to understand the ageing process but also to be aware that our heart and mind is being renewed daily as we walk with God and to focus on the big picture of our eternal security.

The longer we journey into the second half of life the more significant these verses become. As we mourn the loss of our younger selves, deal with the ravages of time on our physical appearances, struggle with the loss of strength, capacity and possibly health and as we look into the face of our own mortality – all things that can rob us of our contentment if we let them – we need an eternal perspective and a hope of heaven that keeps us pressing forward.

"Our deepest need is to find rest in the thing for which we were created. – a right relationship with God. In surrendering our sovereignty (to His sovereignty), in confessing that His wisdom is infinitely more wise than our most brilliant thought, and in admitting that no plan could be more perfect than the plan that comes from the mind of the Almighty, we can begin to reach out to the One who is near and find just what we need for the difficult moments that we face." Paul Tripp

Bibliography and Reading List

The following books reference the quotes used in the presentation as well as others you may find helpful to read.

Barclay, W.B. *The Secret of Contentment*, P&R Publishing Company, 2010

Burroughs, J. *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*, (1648) reprinted Banner of Truth Trust 2000

Easterbrook, G. *The Progress Paradox, How life gets better while people feel worse*, 2005

Galbraith, J.K. *The Affluent Society*, Mentor Books, 1958

Horsfall, T. *Spiritual Growth in a Time of Change, Following God in Mid-life*, Bible Reading Fellowship, 2016

Keller, T. *Every Good Endeavour*, Hodder, 2012

Kendall, R.T. *Total Forgiveness*, Hodder, 2001

Kendall, R.T. *Total Forgiving Ourselves*, Hodder, 2008

Kidner, D. *Psalms 73-150*, IVP, 1977

McGuinness, J. *Making the Most of Mid-Life, Christian Choices and Growth*, SPCK, 2006

NIV Study Bible, Hodder and Stoughton, 2003

New Bible Dictionary, IVP, 2004

Packer, J.I. *The Secret of Contentment*, Address given at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois, 1984

Piper, J. *We Want to Be a Christian Hedonist*, www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/resources/we-want-to-be-a-christian-hedonist, August 31st 2006

Ryle, J.C. *Thoughts for Young Men* (1887), Calvary Press, 1996

Schlossburg, H. *Idols for Destruction, Christian faith and its confrontation with American Society*, Nelson, 1983

Tripp, P.D. *Lost in the Middle: Mid-Life and the Grace of God*, Shepherd Press, 2004

Swenson, R.A. *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial and Time Resources to Overloaded Lives*, NavPress 2004

Vine, W.E. *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Oliphants, 1975

Watson, T. *The Art of Divine Contentment* (1653), re-printed Free Presbyterian Publications, 2001