Secrets of Contentment, Part 3
Scripture: Isaiah 40:29-31; 2 Cointhians. 4:17–18; 2 Corinthians 11:23–33; Ephesians 3:20; Philippians 4:11-13; Colossians 3:2
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Contentment in Difficult Times

3. Detachment from Circumstances

The one thing that steals our contentment more than anything else is trying circumstances. We crumble and lose our sense of satisfaction and peace when we allow our circumstances to victimize us. No doubt Paul was human and suffered that way too but then he learned a different way: remaining content no matter what his circumstances were. “I have learned to be content,” he said, “in *whatever* circumstances I am” (Philippians 4:11, emphasis added). He really meant *whatever*, for in the next verse he ran the gamut of extremes from great poverty to great wealth. It’s possible for us as Christians to learn to be content in facing any situation in life. And we don’t have to wait for the next life to be able to do this. We do need to keep one foot in the next life, however. Paul said it this way: “Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth” (Coossians. 3:2). “Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Cointhians. 4:17–18). Paul endured many horrific circumstances (note his summary in 2 Corinthians 11:23–33) but through them he learned to be content by having an eternal perspective. Realize any circumstance you face is only temporary. The energy you’re tempted to expend on it by getting anxious isn’t worth being compared with your eternal reward. Learn to be content by not taking your earthly circumstances too seriously.

4. Being Sustained by Divine Power

Paul could face any earthly circumstance with this confident assurance: “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). He had learned that no matter how difficult things get in this material world, every Christian has a spiritual undergirding.

In saying he could do all things through Christ, Paul was referring to endurance, not miraculous provision. He didn’t mean he could go on forever without eating or drinking. He couldn’t be battered 5,000 times and still survive. There’s a limit to the physical hardships any human being can endure. Instead Paul was saying, “When I have come to the end of my own resources, then I experience the power of Christ to sustain me until a provision is made.” He believed in the promise of Isaiah 40:31:

“Those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.”

Contentment is a by-product of distress. It comes when you experience the sustaining power of Christ when you simply have run out of steam: “To him who lacks might He increases power” (Isaiah 40:29). We do well to experience enough difficulty in our lives to see Christ’s power on display in us.

Do you know how a pacemaker works? It kicks in when the heart it’s attached to doesn’t work right. It’s a sustaining power. We as believers have a reservoir of spiritual power that moves into action when we have come to the end of our resources. Therefore we can “do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us” (Ephesians 3:20).

You’ll learn contentment when you’ve stood in the valley of the shadow of death, when you’ve been at the brink, when you can’t resolve your problems, when you can’t eliminate the conflict, when you can’t change your work environment, when you’re unable to fight the disease that’s wracking your body. That’s when you’ll turn to God and find the strength to get through the situation.

To add an important qualifier, however, if you’ve been living a life of sin and you’re now at the bottom of the pit where sin has led you, don’t expect the Lord to step in, put on a dazzling display of His power, and make you feel content. What He’s more apt to do is add chastening to the pain that your circumstances have naturally produced. There’s no quick fix for a sinful pattern of living. Just like health is the result of right living in the physical dimension, so is power from God the result of being obedient in the spiritual dimension.

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