

What Is the Secret to Contentment?

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By John MacArthur

If you belong to Christ, like the apostle Paul you can and should learn the secret of a contented life. When Paul wrote "godliness with contentment is great gain" he wasn't just speaking philosophically (1 Tim. 6:6). He had learned the secret to contentment in every circumstance of life (Phil 4:11-2). While that secret eludes most people, it need not elude any true believer. For those who are willing to learn, here are six steps to a contented life from the life and teaching of Paul.

First, learn to give thanks in all things. Paul had learned to give thanks in every circumstance and he exhorted all believers to do the same. Thankfulness is first of all a matter of obedience (1 Thess. 5:18; Eph. 5:18), but it is also a characteristic of a Spirit-filled believer (Eph. 5:18-20).

Second, learn to rest in God's providence. If we truly know God, we know that He is unfolding His agenda and purpose in our lives. He has sovereignly determined each part of His plan for us so that we'll be benefited and He'll be glorified (cf. Rom. 8:28). We should not be surprised or ungrateful when we experience trials because we know that God sees perfectly the end result (cf. 1 Pet. 4:12-13).

Third, learn to be satisfied with little. Paul had learned to make the choice to be satisfied with little, and he knew it was important for others to learn to make that same choice. In 1 Timothy 6:6 Paul exhorted a young pastor with these words: "Now 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 clothing, with these we shall be content." Paul understood that covetousness and contentment are mutually exclusive.

Fourth, learn to live above life's circumstances. That's how Paul lived. In 2 Cor. 12:9-10 he wrote, "Most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

Paul didn't take pleasure in the pain itself, but in the power of Christ manifested through him in times of infirmity, reproach, persecution, and distress. We also should learn to take pleasure in the power of Christ in times of distress.

Fifth, learn to rely on God's power and provision. The apostle Paul wrote, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"; and Jesus said He will never leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5). Like Paul, we can learn to rely on Christ's promise. He faithfully infuses every believer with His own strength and sustains them in their time of need until they receive provision from His hand (Eph. 3:16).

Finally, become preoccupied with the well-being of others. Paul summarized this mindset in Philippians 2:3-4, where he wrote: "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."

A self-centered man is a discontented man. But the soul of the generous man, the man who lives for the interests and benefit of others, will find blessing upon blessing in his life (see Prov. 11:24-5; 19:17; Luke 6:38; 2 Cor. 9:6).

For further information, consider John's audio series ***The Secret to Contentment***.

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