

CHARACTER CRUNCH

PART 3: CONTENTMENT

September 24 & 25, 2005

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Most of us place high value on good character. We debate about it in our elected officials, expect it from our spiritual leaders and evaluate it in everyone around us. We want to be known for it, and we want to instill it in our children. Even so, we find that our good character tends to break down during “crunch time” – when the pressure is on and when things are going wrong. We struggle during the tough times because we fail to “exercise” the traits that make up good character during our normal, everyday lives when pressures and expectations are more manageable.

Contentment is another character trait that is often confused with our feelings and thought to be based on our circumstances. We are able to conjure feelings of contentment from time to time, but they are like “Fool’s Gold”, sparkling and shiny in the moment, but lacking lasting significance.

Too many of us spend our lives mining for the “Fool’s Gold” of false contentment and are disappointed each time we discover that it’s not the real thing.

Five Sources of False Contentment

We look for contentment in...

Positions Possessions Power People Providence

Paul tells us in Philippians, however, that it’s actually possible to experience real contentment in any circumstance...

Philip. 4:11-12 (MSG) *Actually, I don’t have a sense of needing anything personally. I’ve learned by now to be quite content whatever my circumstances. I’m just as happy with little as with much, with much as with little. I’ve found the recipe for being happy whether full or hungry, hands full or hands empty.*

If we’re to understand what Paul discovered – the recipe for real contentment – we need to change our perspective...

First, we need to define it...

Contentment is the state of being satisfied.

Second, we need to answer a few questions...

Question #1: Who decides when I’m satisfied?

Answer – I do

Question #2: On what basis do I make that decision?

Answer – Personal preference

Question #3: What is another term for personal preference?

Answer – Choice

If satisfaction is a choice, then real contentment is the *choice* to be satisfied...

But it is infinitely harder to practice this truth than it is to acknowledge it. The reason is because the sin of discontentment is grounded in the very core of who we are...

The first temptation in the history of mankind was the temptation to be discontent...

Genesis 3:1-7 (MSG) ¹*The serpent was clever, more clever than any wild animal GOD had made. He spoke to the Woman: “Do I understand that God told you not to eat from any tree in the garden?”* ²*The Woman said to the serpent, “Not at all. We can eat from the trees in the garden.”* ³*It’s only about the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, “Don’t eat from it; don’t even touch it or you’ll die.”* ⁴*The serpent told the Woman, “You won’t die.”* ⁵*God knows that the moment you eat from that tree, you’ll see what’s really going on. You’ll be just like God, knowing everything, ranging all the way from good to evil.”* ⁶*When the Woman saw that the tree looked like good eating and realized what she would get out of it—she’d know everything!—she took and ate the fruit and then gave some to her husband, and he ate.* ⁷*Immediately the two of them did “see what’s really going on”—saw themselves naked! They sewed fig leaves together as makeshift clothes for themselves.*

- God provided far more than Adam and Eve needed, withholding only one thing from them.
- Satan used that one thing to sow seeds of discontent in Eve.

The result...

Satan successfully tempted Eve to question God’s goodness, leading to discontentment that resulted in:

1. Disobedience
2. Death

He tried the same tactic with Jesus, but with very different results...

Matthew 4:1-25 (MSG) *Next Jesus was taken into the wild by the Spirit for the Test. The Devil was ready to give it. [2] Jesus prepared for the Test by fasting forty days and forty nights. That left him, of course, in a state of extreme hunger, [3] which the Devil took advantage of in the first test: “Since you are God’s Son, speak the word that will turn these stones into loaves of bread.” [4] Jesus answered by quoting Deuteronomy: “It takes more than bread to stay alive. It takes a steady stream of words from God’s mouth.” [5] For the second test the Devil took him to the Holy City. He sat him on top of the Temple and said, [6] “Since you are God’s Son, jump.”*

The Devil goaded him by quoting Psalm 91: "He has placed you in the care of angels. They will catch you so that you won't so much as stub your toe on a stone." [7] Jesus countered with another citation from Deuteronomy: "Don't you dare test the Lord your God." [8] For the third test, the Devil took him on the peak of a huge mountain. He gestured expansively, pointing out all the earth's kingdoms, how glorious they all were. [9] Then he said, "They're yours—lock, stock, and barrel. Just go down on your knees and worship me, and they're yours." [10] Jesus' refusal was curt: "Beat it, Satan!" He backed his rebuke with a third quotation from Deuteronomy: "Worship the Lord your God, and only him. Serve him with absolute single-heartedness." [11] The Test was over. The Devil left. And in his place, angels! Angels came and took care of Jesus' needs.

Satan tempted Jesus to be discontent...

- In His pain.
- About His position.
- With His power.

The result...

Jesus withstood Satan's temptation and chose to be satisfied.

Paul encountered temptation just as Eve and Jesus did. In choosing to follow Jesus' example, He discovered how to experience real contentment...

Real contentment is the result of choosing to be satisfied with God's grace. It is achieved by incorporating four practical steps into our daily lives. We need to...

1. Memorize scripture.

Psalm 119:11 (MSG) *I've banked your promises in the vault of my heart so I won't sin myself bankrupt.*

2. Ask God to reveal our discontent.

Psalm 139:23-24 (MSG) *Investigate my life, O God, find out everything about me; Cross-examine and test me, get a clear picture of what I'm about; [24] See for yourself whether I've done anything wrong—then guide me on the road to eternal life.*

3. Pray for the Holy Spirit to change our hearts.

Psalm 119:36-37 (MSG) *Give me a bent for your words of wisdom, and not for piling up loot. [37] Divert my eyes from toys and trinkets, invigorate me on the pilgrim way.*

4. Share what we have with others.

Hebrews 13:16 (MSG) *Make sure you don't take things for granted and go slack in working for the common good; share what you have with others. God takes particular pleasure in acts of worship—a different kind of "sacrifice"—that take place in kitchen and workplace and on the streets.*