



"HOW CAN I BE CONTENT?"

"Contentment is the inward, gracious, quiet spirit that joyfully rests in God's providence."

Erik Raymond, *Chasing Contentment* (Crossway, 2017), p23.

Jeremiah Burroughs described contentment in his 1648 book title as *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*.

REFLECTION QUESTION

On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being 'very content', how content are you as a ministry wife?

Susanna and Katherine both ministry wives are struggling with contentment:

Susanna is a young mum of three children. Her husband is in his first church as a pastor. She loves children's work and is well supported by her husband, but she is very tired and sometimes overwhelmed. Suzie feels that others in the church think she is "super mum" and that she does not have the same struggles they do. She always tries to be bright and cheerful, but she thinks she is becoming more critical of other ladies in the fellowship and she can be very short tempered at home and resents her husband sacrificially serving the church membership. She daydreams about being back in the work place; going out with her single friends and having her "own" money to spend.

Katherine has served alongside her husband for 20 years and they have been in their present church for 12 years. It has been hard going. Her husband's ministry has been criticised and she has too. The church is small and very few have come to Christ. They struggle financially and she works full-time to contribute to the household finances. She would love to be in a big church; to serve alongside other women and often feels fed up and is finding it hard to pick up her Bible and spend time with God; sometimes her Bible lies untouched from one Sunday to another.

Maybe aspects of Susie’s and Katherine’s experience resonate with you. However, you don’t have to have young children or be in a smaller church to struggle with contentment.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What things can eat away at our sense of contentment?

Identify three areas of life and ministry where you feel you need to learn to be content?

1. CONTENTMENT IN OUR CIRCUMSTANCES

¹⁰I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹²I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Philippians 4:10-13

Paul makes it clear that contentment is possible “*whatever the circumstances*” (v11) and “*in any and every situation*” (v12). Paul is writing from prison (Philippians 1:13) and throughout his ministry endured much suffering (see 2 Corinthians 11:23-29); Paul has had times of being in “*in need and in plenty*” (v12).

Contentment is to be learned (v11-12). It is a process like weaning (see Psalm 131). Paul makes it clear that this ‘learning’ is both a discipline, like being in a classroom and an experience of God working in our lives. We need to respond to Bible teaching to grow in contentment and pray that circumstances we live through whether pleasant or difficult will teach us contentment.

Paul shows us that contentment comes through Christ: “*I can do all things through him who gives me strength*” (v13). This doesn’t mean that we will achieve all our ambitions but that nothing is too difficult for God and therefore we can look beyond our present circumstances and know eternal realities which surpass the present challenges. We can experience the sufficiency of Christ and the grace and strength he gives (See 2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

There are many challenges in ministry that threaten our contentment as ministry wives. For example, ministry can bring financial constraints which makes it hard to be content in a materialistic society and Satan can capitalise on the sacrifices we make in ministry, sacrifices of time and energy so that seeds of discontentment sometimes grow into weeds of resentment and bitterness.

We need to seek joy in Christ as we pursue contentment in our own hearts. A sinful heart is the biggest challenge to contentment. Discontentment can come from the smallest of things as our hearts latch onto something which we struggle to accept.

2. CONTENTMENT IN CHRIST

⁷But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

Philippians 3:7-9

Paul's life had been turned around when he encountered the risen Christ. Philippians 3:7-9 sets out his new priority – knowing Christ Jesus as Lord. Paul left behind things which the world considered “gain” to pursue Christ.

In Christ, Paul had a secure status – “*righteousness by faith*” (v9); surpassing satisfaction – “*counts everything as a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord*” (v8); and sufficient strength – “*my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus*” (see Philippians 4:19).

Consider the threats to your contentment that you have identified. They may be small, they may be large, they may have recently come into your life or you may have been struggling with them for years. Paul has written about anxiety, the need for prayer and the promise of “*the peace of God, which transcends all understanding*” that will “*guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 4:7). When we encounter difficulties that affect us deeply, Paul directs us to Christ.

Hard things happen to God's people. The Bible clearly teaches us that God is good; He is wise; He is sovereign and purposeful. We don't understand all his purposes. We have a sufficient God even when our questions aren't answered. As Erik Raymond says,

*“We must take the thread of our circumstance
and run it through the needle of God's character.”*

Chasing Contentment, p127.

THINK IT THROUGH

1. Return to the description of Susie and Katherine at the start of this study. How would you point either ministry wife to Christ?
2. *“How we read the Bible is pivotal to our pursuit of contentment”* (Raymond, *Chasing Contentment*, p72). Does your Bible reading need a fresh focus and priority? How can you do this?
3. What dominates your horizon, your own circumstances or a knowledge of the character of God? How can you grow in your knowledge of the character of God?
4. Prayerfully ask that God will grow you, so you learn contentment both through the work of the Holy Spirit in the schoolroom of studying the Bible but also through the experiences of life as a ministry wife.
5. Be honest with your husband about your struggles to be content and pray about these together.

May we each be able to say with Paul,

“I have learned the secret of contentment in any and every situation...

*...to our God and Father be glory for ever and ever.
Amen.”*

Philippians 4:12 & 4:20