

662 Words

Learning Contentment

by

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Contentment is an elusive goal. Ask any exhausted parent on a desperate bedtime mission to locate someone's favorite blanket. Check with the harried Mom attempting to squelch her child's vociferous demand for a hamburger and toy served in a special box. Mom yields and purchases a few minutes of peace only to watch that child's contentment dissolve in the throes of a new desire in the next check-out line. Is the quest for contentment a problem for children only?

The U.S. Census reports the average size of new homes has reached 2453 square feet, up 6% in two years. The Self Storage Association states the availability of rentable space in the United States for possessions that won't fit in our attics or garages at just above 2.3 billion square feet, an area more than three times the size of Manhattan Island (NY). What fuels our unsettling drive to acquire stuff?

Casual conversations with coworkers include comparisons of possessions, achievements, and status. Contentment that warmed the heart at breakfast dissipates under the powerful urge to replace and upgrade. No one wants to own second best.

Luke 12 relates a parable about a man whose fields produced bumper crops. He had all he

needed for a luxurious life, and the surplus filled his barns to capacity. His solution was to acquire additional space for goods and add to the pile. Contentment eluded him, eternity surprised him, and his wealth was eventually forfeited.

The secret to contentment is explained in Philippians 4:11 (ESV), "...for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content." Paul, the author, struggled through the ups and downs of his walk with God. In time, as his heart drew closer to God, Paul's life goals and his desires changed. Pleasing God became his mission.

Contentment can be learned if we have the willingness to work hard. Our progress may be slow or even backward some days, but we recognize the benefits of a contented lifestyle and forge ahead. Along the journey we develop key behaviors.

Adopt a long-term view of life.

The wealthy farmer in Luke 12 missed life's big picture. He settled for the hollow existence of collecting material goods and excluded all else. We find no mention of relationships with family or friends. We know nothing of any influence he had on his contemporaries.

Develop a spiritual focus.

Paul's mission statement (Philippians 1:21) focused his efforts as well as his thoughts. He lived with awareness of his higher purpose. Philippians with its message of joy and peace was written while Paul was imprisoned for his faith. His contentment was thoroughly tested.

Consider the needs of others.

Acts 20:25 (ESV) asks us to, "...remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" A generous spirit flows from a contented heart. Opportunities to share surround us, and 1 John 3:17 tells us that meeting other's needs demonstrates the reality of God's love within us.

Practice daily thanksgiving.

I was challenged to take a blank sheet of paper to a quiet spot and compile a list of all the good things God has made possible for me. Delights, pleasures, lessons learned, experiences, opportunities—all of it combines to give lengthy support for a thankful attitude. Contentment will not survive the barren landscape of a thankless heart.

Input the right stuff.

Advertising has its place in our culture, but the roiling stream of sales pitches can overwhelm the sprouts of contentment we hope to cultivate. Read Philippians 4:8 as Paul urges us to filter the input to our minds. The battle for contentment will be won or lost internally long before the evidence is visible to others.

Can we afford to choose contentment? That character quality comes with a steep price. Perhaps the words of Erskine Mason (1805-1851), a Presbyterian minister, will help us decide, “They that deserve nothing should be content with anything...”

That’s something to consider, isn’t it?

Author bio:

John is a writer from Raleigh, NC. Learn more about his work at www.nicholsnotes.com