

One day, a financial planner was preparing to meet with a new client, and as he reviewed this client's paperwork, he became very concerned. The client came in, and the financial planner said, "Well, I've been reviewing your paperwork, and I have to tell you, if I were you, I'd be worried." "Why do you say that?" the client said.

"Well, on the one hand, you don't have any debt, so that's good. On the other hand, you don't have any savings. You don't own any stocks or bonds. You have no equity, because you move around all the time. You don't really seem to have a regular source of income. According to your social security statement, you won't be receiving much when you retire. You don't have an IRA or 401k. You are getting older. Doesn't any of this concern you?" the financial planner said. "Actually, no," the client said. "I feel fine. I'm content," The financial planner was very surprised at how calm his client was about his finances. "You hardly have a dime to your name, and yet, you don't seem to be worried at all." Of course, this client was the Apostle Paul, who says in our text for today, "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation." I don't know about you, but I want that kind of contentment. Let's look at the Secret To Contentment.

What is the secret of being content in any and every situation? It all comes down to two things – where is your focus, and where is your trust. If your trust and focus are in the right place, you will be content, and you will be a good manager of the things God has given to you.

Where do most people look today, as they seek to be content in their lives? Most people are looking for contentment in all the wrong places. Their focus is primarily on money and recreational activities. And their trust is primarily in themselves.

You often see that when there's a big lottery pay out, and the newscasters are standing in front of the gas stations interviewing people who are buying lottery tickets. You can see it in people's eyes – "If only I could win the lottery, then I would finally be content. Then all my troubles would go away, and finally, I would be happy." And yet, there are a great many stories of wealthy people who are discontent with life.

Here's an interesting quote from People Magazine, 1978 – who is this: "I sit in my house in Buffalo and sometimes I get so lonely it's unbelievable. Life has been so good to me. I've got a great wife, good kids, my own health – and I'm lonely and bored... I often wondered why so many rich people commit suicide. Money sure isn't a cure-all." Do you know who said that? It was OJ Simpson, when things were going well for him, long before his problems that took place and led to murder charges.

As you pursue the American dream, if your focus is on money, and your trust is in yourself – you will never, ever be content. Let's look at the Apostle Paul. He lived a life of extremes. As he traveled all over the world, almost single-handedly starting the Christian church, he experienced highs and lows. At times he was well-taken care of, well-fed, good clothes to wear, a nice place to stay. But he also experienced some lows. At times he went hungry, he didn't have good clothes to wear, he didn't have a nice place to stay. And yet, through it all, look at what Paul says in verse 11: "I have learned to be content, whatever the circumstances." His focus was not on money. And his trust was not in himself. Look at verse 12: "I 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." His secret, was where he placed his focus, and where he placed his trust. Look at verse 13: "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength." Who is the "Him" Paul is talking about here? Obviously, it is Christ. His focus, his trust, were both in Christ. It was Christ who gave him the strength to be content, regardless of the circumstances that Paul found himself in. That was his secret.

Paul now tells us about what distracts our focus. It is when we compare ourselves to others. That will lead to discontentment. v. 11b "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances" and that comes from not comparing myself to others.. There will always be people that make more money than you, who have greater opportunities than you have, who have fewer problems. So what? That has no bearing at all on your own personal happiness.

Paul continues, "We don't look around at what we see right now, the troubles all around us. But we look forward to the joys in heaven. The troubles will soon be over but the joys that come will last forever." Paul says, "I consider that these present sufferings shall not be compared to the glory that will be revealed in us." Paul says, I don't look around, I look up. I don't spend my time comparing myself to other people. I keep my eyes on what is to come. Three misconceptions about happiness:

- 1) I must have what others have to be happy. That's the myth behind all fads and fashions. It's just not true.
- 2) I must be liked by everyone in order to be happy. You don't, you know. Many people spend so much time trying to win the approval of others. You cannot go through life without some disapproval -- if you do anything, somebody is not going to like it. Even Jesus couldn't please everybody. Only a fool would try to do what Jesus couldn't do. You don't need everybody's approval to be happy.
- 3) Having more will make me more happy. Howard Hughes was asked, "How much money does it take to make a man happy?" He said, "Just a little more." As your income goes up, so does your expenses.

I Timothy 6:6-8 "Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that."

All possessions are temporary. They're just loaned to us. We use them while we're here on earth, have a good time with them, enjoy them, use them for God's glory, but they're not going to last. Don't get an obsession with possessions.

So if I don't look to myself to find contentment, where do I look for power? I must learn to draw on Christ's power. v. 13 "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength." You can handle stage 4 cancer diagnosis, make it through a stock market crash, when you have problems and you don't know where to go. I can handle everything, Paul says. I can cope. He had an external power source. He was depending, not on his own power, but God's power.

Do you know how you know when you're depending on your own power? You get tired. Fatigue comes from living life on your own resources rather than on the resources of God.

The Greek word for "strength" is the word from which we get the word "dynamite" or "dynamo". A dynamo is something that gives continual energy. Paul is saying, Jesus Christ is the dynamo of my life. He gives me continuous energy. I don't run out. I am confident and capable to cope with the circumstances of life because I draw on Christ's power.

Then I need to learn to trust God for all my needs. This is the secret of satisfaction in life. v. 19 "And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus." Not some or most or religious -- all. When I buy an insurance policy I read through it to find out what is covered. When I know what's covered, I don't worry -- it's covered. The Bible is God's insurance policy. There are over 6000 promises in the Bible which you can claim. Many of you cannot claim them because you don't even know they're there. As you read the policy manual find out what God has guaranteed to do in your life. Once you know those guarantees you don't have to worry.

Matthew 6:31-33 "So do worry, saying, what shall we eat? Or what shall we drink? Or What shall we wear? For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you as well. Put Jesus first and Jesus will take care of your needs. Put Him at the

center and everything else will be taken care of. The real reason that people are unhappy, unsatisfied, and unfulfilled is because Jesus Christ is not the center of their lives. According to statistics, an average person's anxiety is focused 40% on things that will never happen, 30% on things about the past that can't be changed, 12% on things about criticism by others, mostly untrue, 10% about health, 8% about real problems that will be faced. Whether these stats are true or not, there are very real anxieties and concerns that we face each day, and they seem to loom up larger than reality at times. It is tie you turn your worries into prayers. I love the words of Isaiah 26:3 in the King James version, It says, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose heart is stayed on thee."

A man was walking down a country road carrying a huge bundle. Having compassion, a farmer stopped and helped him into the back of his pickup. While driving on, glancing into the side mirror, he noticed that the poor man was still holding that huge bundle on his back. He shouted: "My friend, why don't you put the bundle down? At times we are just that stupid. What's your burden? Is it sin, guilt, sorrow, sorry? Christ says: Cast all your cares on me, for I care for you. Put your bundle down. Let Christ help you carry it. The hymnwriter had it right. Oh what peace we often forfeit, oh what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry, everything to God in prayer. Bring your requests to God daily. Don't let the cares of this world strip you of your joy!

When you try to find contentment in life through people, fads, popularity, prestige... they don't last. Discontent just means that Jesus Christ is not the center of my life. When I'm not contented it means I'm looking for something else.

How amazing, that Jesus Christ, the richest man that ever walked the face of the earth, would become so poor, so that you and I could have the forgiveness of sins. Even though he was more powerful than the President, richer than the Rockefellers, he became a poor, homeless, Jewish rabbi. But that's not all. He sunk even lower, becoming a sacrifice on the cross for the sins of the world. How amazing, that Christ would do all this, so that today, you could have the forgiveness of sins.

When you give focus on Christ, and then, you will find the contentment you've been looking for all your life. Let your focus first be on him, and not your monthly income check. Let your trust be in him, and not yourself. Trust him when he says that all these other things will be given to you as well. Trust him, when he says that he will take care of you. Trust him, when he says that he will make sure that you'll never have too much, and you'll never have too little. And during those times in life when God tests you, and you are tempted to be discontent, then remember Paul's secret. Let your focus be on Christ, on his love and forgiveness which he has shown to you on the cross. And let your trust be in Christ. You can do all things through him who strengthens you. Amen.