

# THE HARVESTER

*"The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2)*

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## CONTENTMENT

It has been said that our society today is marked by "inextinguishable discontent." And I can't say that I don't agree with that assessment. The mindset of the average man/woman today longs for what's better: a better job, a better car, a better relationship, etc. And on top of that we long endlessly for the next thing: the next weekend, the next vacation, the next purchase...

We are never satisfied, never content, and envious of those who have what we have not attained or accumulated. What about you? What's something you want? What's something

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you long for? I'm not speaking of needs here, but of wants. There's a list, isn't there? You see what I mean by "inextinguishable discontent."

When our sons were young they always wanted something else—usually something they didn't need and something we couldn't afford even if we wanted them to have it—I used a line from a once popular song that says, "You can't always get what you want...but you get what you need."

Solomon's writings in the book of Ecclesiastes illustrate to us, in part, from Solomon's own personal experience that the pursuit of more, of better, of bigger earthly "things" when pursued as ends in themselves—lead to dissatisfaction and emptiness. Solomon's words were "*vanity of vanities, all is vanity.*" In other words, it's a useless or futile effort. Think about it like a breath or a vapor—like the breath you see when you exhale on a really cold day; it's short lived and useless. Solomon meant that these longings yield a sense of satisfaction that's both temporary and futile.

So what is contentment, and how can I achieve it? Let's look at Philippians 4:10-20:

*(10) But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. (11) Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. (12) I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. (13) I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. (14) Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction. (15) Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. (16) For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity.*

*(17) Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. (18) But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God. (19) But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. (20) Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

Verse 13 of this passage gets the most recitals, and I can understand how Paul says “*all things*” which means what it says—that through our Savior Jesus Christ I can do all things. Not by myself, not on my own, but through Jesus Christ.

Let's examine verse 13 in the context of this passage. In this part of the epistle, Paul is expressing appreciation for the church at Philippi for their support of his work. In verse 10 Paul rejoiced that once again the Philippians had supplied his need—he acknowledges their continued concern for him but also their lack of opportunities to help him. In verse 11 Paul emphasizes that he isn't complaining that he's been in need of their support: “*for I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*” Notice that Paul says he “learned” contentment. In verse 12 the word “instructed” is translated as “learned” in the ESV. Paul had learned how to be content, whether in times of plenty or in times of need. Verse 13 implies that it was only through Jesus Christ being with Paul that he “learned” this lesson.

Paul reveals in verses 14-17 that the assistance given him by the Philippians was a noble thing. From when Paul first preached the Gospel in Macedonia, this church (the church at Philippi) was the only one that helped him several times. Paul says that it wasn't because he was asking for their gifts, but that he desired for souls to be saved *because of* or *by* their assistance. In verse 18 Paul relays that he has all that he needs after Epaphroditus delivered their gift. He describes their offering as one that was pleasing to God. In the last 2 verses of

this passage (verses 19 and 20) Paul shares with the Philippians assurance that God will supply all their needs, giving them reason to be content.

So contentment is a trait to be desired by all Christians—but one that those who will be content must learn. It's not natural to us; we're not born with it and it is not a gift. Like all things that are good, righteous, pure, virtuous, and of good report—it's against our human nature and something that we, through the Holy Spirit, must learn to be.

I think discontentment is similar to what Jesus was talking about in Matthew 6:30-33:

*Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

Just as too little faith causes one to worry about not having life's necessities, having too little faith can also cause one to not be content with what they have and always want more, bigger, better. “O ye of little faith?”

Listen to what Paul told Timothy about contentment:

*Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God*

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The Harvester

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*and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort. If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. (1 Tim. 6:1-5)*

Supposing that gain is godliness is akin to using godliness as a means of financial gain. Who does that? Paul gives the answer to that: the proud, those who know nothing, those obsessed with disputes and arguments over words. So what comes from this? Envy, strife, abusive or angry criticism, evil suspicions, useless or perverse disputes among those with corrupt minds who think that personal gains will come from godliness.

*But 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 raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. (1 Tim. 6:6-10)*

On the contrary, great gain comes from godliness with contentment! Paul told Timothy if he had food and clothes to be content. Now, let's all measure ourselves against that ruler...I for one would come up noticeably short!

Let's look also at what the writer of Hebrews wrote about contentment:

*Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me. (Heb. 13:5-6)*

Those who were more prosperous than these Jewish Christians verbally abused them with references to the fact that they were poor. The writer of Hebrews' advice: let your conduct/manner of life be without covetousness and be content with what you have. Because God has told us that he's with us and will never abandon us (His children). Brothers and Sisters, if we've got that assurance in our hip pocket why would we not be able to learn the secret of contentment?

In 2 Corinthians 9:8 Paul told the Corinthians that we, God's children, through God's grace have enough of everything...to the extent that we can excel in good works! Worrying about the extra things we want or think we just have to have hinders our good works and occupies our time and our thoughts.

So how do I learn to be content? In verse 11 of our text Paul said he learned to be content in whatever state he found himself in, whether empty or full. I read years ago that if you do something new 7 times you will have learned how to do it, but if you do it 28 times it becomes a habit. We need to do both: learn to be content and make it a habit!

Here are 4 suggestions that might help one learn to be content:

1. *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: (Php. 1:21-23)*

*"To die is gain."* If Paul died he would get to be with Christ. *"To live is Christ."* If Paul (or us) are alive here on earth Christ's sacrifice on the cross is the cornerstone of our contentment.

Because of the cross we are freed from the chains of sin; we have salvation; our friendship with God is possible; and we have a home prepared in Heaven. What else really matters? Isn't that enough?

*2. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before (Php. 3:13)*

As did Paul, we have to let go of the past. We can't achieve/learn contentment while holding on to past failures and mistakes (others and ours). Stop saying "I should have \_\_\_\_\_." Stop saying "If only \_\_\_\_\_." Stop saying "If he/she hadn't \_\_\_\_\_." Completely forgive others and in turn let God's forgiveness cover us. For most, this isn't easy, but it'll help one to have a heart at contentment.

*3. But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. (Php. 4:19)*

Using patience, it's here that we wait on God...on His will. He will give His children what they need when they need it. So, we take it one day at a time looking forward, not back.

*4. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. (Php. 4:13)*

Find sufficiency in our Savior—not self-sufficiency because that's not in us, even if we think "I'm strong" or "I can take care of this." Realize that our dependency is on God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Look at our spiritual "big picture" not our material "big picture" to help us achieve/learn contentment. Is Jesus Christ "just enough" for you to be content?

RICKY MURPHY  
Woodland, AL

**GET RICH QUICK--  
COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS**

## GOSPEL MEETINGS

<b>DATES</b>	<b>PLACE</b>	<b>SPEAKER</b>
June 4 - 9	Taylor's Cross Roads Roanoke, AL	Wilbur Bass, Donald Thompson, & Hunter Bulger
June 11 - 16	Mt. Carmel Woodland, AL	Bill Prince, Jr. & Brad Prince
June 18 - 23	Ephesus Ephesus, GA	J. D. McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
June 26 - 30	Cornerstone Irvine, KY	Timothy Lewis (Eubank, KY)

## SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. What relation was Jacob to Abraham?
2. Who won the hand of Caleb's daughter, Achsah?
3. Who persuaded Delilah to betray Samson?
4. Who was Boaz a kinsman of?
5. What inscription was on the altar in Athens?

...ANSWERS NEXT MONTH

And remember last month's questions?

1. When was the festival of Passover established?  
WHEN THE PLAGUE OF THE DEATH OF THE  
FIRSTBORN WAS BROUGHT UPON THE LAND OF  
EGYPT (Exo. 12:27)
2. Why were the Israelites afraid to enter the Promised Land?  
THE INHABITANTS WERE GREAT AND TALL  
(Num. 13:33-14:4)
3. What was the name of Ahasuerus' new queen?  
ESTHER (Est. 2:17)
4. What was the affliction of Bartimaeus? BLIND (Mark 10:46)
5. What did Saul see on the road approaching Damascus?  
A SHINING LIGHT FROM HEAVEN (Acts 9:3)