

STRENGTH FOR THE STRESSES

“How Strength is Made Perfect in Weakness”

Study Number Five – “Keys to Contentment” – 1 Timothy 6:6-8, Philippians 4:6, 10-13 & Habakkuk 3:17-18

We will be looking at three passages of scripture as we study the KEYS TO CONTENTMENT:

1. 1 Timothy 6:6-8
2. Philippians 4:6, 10-13
3. Habakkuk 3:17-18

We will now look at the first passage together:

1 Timothy 6:6-8

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.

The apostle is preparing to leave this life. These are the last epistles that he wrote. They are addressed to young Timothy

to prepare him for life.

He tells him that it's one thing to pursue GODLINESS, and it's another thing to pursue CONTENTMENT. But to have those two things together "is great gain."

Now for most of us, the problem of godliness is not that big a hassle. When we read the scriptures we realize that we come to know the Lord Jesus as Savior. That's the way we begin a spiritual life. We're made alive in the Lord Jesus.

Then we begin to grow by our intake of the Word of God. The Word says a lot about how we grow up in the Lord Jesus by reading His Word, implementing it in our lives, and beginning to let our lives fall into accordance with His plan.

That's "godliness." But the other side of the coin is something else. How do we become a godly, contented Christian? How do we come to the place where we get over these feelings of conflict, distrust, anxiety, fear, uncertainty? How do we get to that place where we are really content in life and in our relationship with Jesus Christ? This is what we're going to talk about.

Now listen to the apostle as he's expressing appreciation to these Christians in Philippi for sharing with him in some of the times of his need.

Philippians 4:6, 10-13

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything; tell God your needs and don't forget to thank him for his answers.

How grateful I am and how I praise the Lord that you are helping me again. I know you have always been anxious to send what you could, but for a while you didn't have a chance. Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned [circle that] I have learned how to get along happily whether I have much or little. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of contentment in every situation, whether it be a full stomach or hunger, plenty or want; for I can do everything God asks me to with the help of Christ who gives me the strength and power.

Now let's look at passages in the Old Testament so we can take these three passages together and see the principles of contentment.

Habakkuk has a two-fold problem. First of all, as the letter opens, he's mad at God because God isn't doing anything. He's very discontented over the fact that God's given him a bum deal. The people in the land are going unjudged and God isn't doing anything about it.

He is really upset about the fact that God's not seemingly answering his prayers or doing anything for him. He's very discontented. And the Lord says, "Now Habakkuk down boy. I

am doing something. Although you can't see it, I'm doing a great work. In fact, just to reveal a little bit of it to you..."

This is the way the Lord does it lots of times. He gives us a small cloud in the sky in anticipation of the fact that He's going to do something great. "I am doing something. I'm going to bring the Babylonians in here and I'm going to clean up the nation Israel and everything's going to be alright."

Well now Habakkuk's just like so many of us. Our discontentment increases because we don't like the way God's doing what He's doing. Everybody knows that two dirties don't make a clean. After all, Babylon's worse than Israel.

And so we begin our discontentment increases by our inability to accept what God is doing in our lives. First He isn't doing anything—we don't like that. And then secondly, when He does begin to reveal what He is doing, we don't like what He's doing. And discontentment increases.

But the secret about old Habakkuk is that when we get to the end of chapter 3, he's where God wants him to be. He's content. Notice this contentment is expressed in his feelings about the circumstances.

"Even though the stock market is destroyed, and there's neither left blossom nor fruit, and though all the crops fail, and all the fields lie barren; and even if the flocks die in the fields and all the gas tanks are empty, yet, I will rejoice in the Lord; I will be happy in the God of my salvation."

Habakkuk 3:17-18

Even though the fig trees are all destroyed, and there's neither blossom left nor fruit, and though the olive crops all fail, and the fields lie barren; even if the flocks die in the fields and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will be happy in the God of my salvation.

He has learned something through this whole process of dialogue with the Father. And that is, he's come to a point of being willing to accept what God has permitted in his life. And he expresses contentment.

See the progression? Paul tells Timothy, "Look, godliness with contentment is great gain." And so coupled with your godliness, there needs to be contentment.

Then he tells the Philippians, "I learned how to be content." This is something which he learned. It wasn't something that was just inherent.

Habakkuk expresses the position the Lord wants all of us to express. That no matter how bad the external circumstances might be and how terrible they might see as being against us, that should not affect our contentment in our relationship to Jesus Christ, our heavenly Father and with each other.

Here's a little piece that fits well here:

I thank God for the bitter things,
they've been a friend of grace,
they've driven me from the paths of ease,
to storm the secret place.

I thank Him for the friends who've failed
to meet my heart's deep need.
They've driven me to the Savior's feet,
upon His love to feed.
(source unknown)

We will now look at three principles to help us to have a content life. These principles will be ones that we will be able to implement in our lives.

PRINCIPLE #1:

If we are a content person, we have learned to accept ourselves.

This is the beginning point to contentment.

Can we accept ourselves the way we are as a unique individual that God has created for a specific purpose?

We read in Matthew 13:45-46, Jesus says this: "Again the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant man seeking fine pearls, but when he has found one pearl of great price went and sold all that he had and bought it."

The picture in this parable is the picture of God seeing us as a pearl of great price. He gave all that He had, the death of His Son, because of His love for us. We were so precious to Him that He paid the price of His Son for us.

Now we say, “But really, to be a Christian I’m not supposed to like myself.” Is that right?

A lot of people have that idea. Naturally when we come to spiritual truth, we do have feelings inside which are negative. And there are feelings which are there, simply because we’re far from what we know we ought to be.

We’re upset over the fact that we’ve missed so many fabulous opportunities to be spiritual giants. And so within ourselves we’re disappointed that we’re like that. Or we’ve gained a few pounds and our clothes are too tight so we hate ourselves for that.

Now independent of that, there has to come into the emotional makeup of a child of God the realization that we are unique. There’s only one of us. And before we can be content, we need to accept ourselves the way we are.

Jesus speaks on this in Luke: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and your neighbor as you do yourself.” (ref. Luke 10:27)

There’s a principle here. Before we can love our neighbor, we

have to learn to love ourselves. And our capacity to love ourselves will free us to love people around us.

In Ephesians 5, when he's giving the husbands commands, he says:

“A man is to be loving his wife as he does himself.” (ref. Ephesians 5:28)

It's our responsibility to realize that in the eyes of God we are a “pearl of great price.” We are precious to Him. We're worth everything because it cost Him the death of His only Son.

Now if someone is rejecting themselves, as a person whom God has created, and you don't like what God has made, then they are not content. And there are TWO REASONS why they're doing that:

1. They are making a COMPARISON with somebody else.

They're comparing what God made in them with somebody else.

So when we begin to compare other created beings, naturally we begin to reject ourselves. So if we're going to be content, don't compare.

2. CRITICISM.

When people get mad at us or they criticize us and they say

something like, “You sure have an ugly nose,” we begin to reject ourselves because of that criticism.

Looking at the apostle Matthew, he could have been really a tremendous candidate of malcontentment, because he could have believed what everybody else was saying about him.

Everybody hated his guts because he was a representative of the IRS. And on top of that, every time he turned around he was affixing a new tax. And they were calling him a publican and a sinner. They were putting him at the lowest possible point on the social strata.

It’s pretty devastating to one’s self-image when everybody around them is saying negative things about them. Pretty soon they begin to believe what others are saying.

It can come from two points. If we’re a victim of comparison from our own insides out, then we don’t have a very good self-image. Or if we’re a victim of the criticisms and malice of others, likewise it’s possible for us to have a damaged self-image.

So we’re saying that God expects us to accept ourselves as a unique creation—a pearl of great price.

People who become Christians have the idea that we’ve got to begin to degrade ourselves in order to prove that we’re spiritually humble. And they sort of look at the degrading of themselves as a mark of spirituality.

Someone might say, “Oh man, you really look nice.”

They respond with, “Oh, my hair’s a mess.”

Or, “Boy, I really appreciate that fabulous meal.”

Their response is, “Oh it was really nothing. I burnt it.”

And there’s a feeling somehow we get that people have the idea that the more spiritual they are the more they degrade themselves.

Now degrading ourselves is not humility. Humility is not to think of ourselves at all really, if we want a definition of humility from a spiritual point of view. And it is not spiritual for us to be constantly running ourselves down.

None of us are rejects. We are not a factory second. We don’t have flaws that cannot be handled. The Lord is sovereign and He can remake the vessel as seems good to Him to accomplish His objectives, with us just the way we are.

And if we are going to become content, we must be willing to say this, “God, when You made me, You made something unique and You made something beautiful and I thank You for what You’ve made. To get the maximum benefit out of what You’ve made, I want to get to know Your Son better.”

This is what the apostle Paul meant when he said, “I count all

things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.” (ref. Philippians 3:8)

He had a supreme desire to get to know the Lord better because he knew as he got to know the Lord better, he’d get to know himself better. And the more he got to love the Lord, the more he became liberated to love himself. And then ultimately liberated to love others. It’s a cycle.

I. ACCEPTING OURSELVES

Then the secret to contentment is:

1. that we learn to have a better understanding of ourselves and we accept what He’s created.

The lower our opinion of ourselves, the lower our opinion of God.

Men in scripture who’ve had fresh revelations of God’s presence and awareness of Him, have come to a new understanding of themselves. We find this in the book of Isaiah chapter 6. We find it in Job chapter 42.

Now are we willing to accept principle number 1 for contentment? He made us something precious and of great worth and there’s no one like us. And we have value to the Father, the same value as His only Son, Jesus Christ. Can we accept that?

Now what happens when we fail to accept ourselves? Two things—and they're both ugly:

1. HYPOCRISY, because if we don't accept ourselves the way we are, then we want to wear a mask with everybody. And we wear a mask because we're rejecting ourselves.

And since we don't like what God has created, we certainly know that everybody else doesn't like what God's created so we have to wear a mask to project an image of what we think they're going to like and what we think God wants us to act like. So we're filled with hypocrisy.

2. We're filled with GUILT over the fact that we're mad at God and we're rejecting what He created.

What's our response to this statement?

The Lord threw away the mold when He finished making us.

Praise the Lord!

If that's the answer, it's a poor self-image. However, if we say, "How unfortunate. Now the world can't be blessed with two of us." Then we have another problem.

Are we willing to accept ourselves?

II. ACCEPTING HIS PLAN

The second principle to contentment is a willingness to accept His plan.

Are we willing to accept His plan for our life without any reservation?

Isaiah 48:17

Thus saith the Lord, thy redeemer, the holy one of Israel, “I am the Lord thy God who teacheth thee to profit, who leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go.

Can we accept His plan for conforming us to the image of His Son? Truly and 100%?

Now we can go to the Lord and say, “Okay Lord, I give it to You.” But we can still maintain our right to rule and our right to decide the good and the bad.

We have to come to a point where we’re going to say, “Who is going to run the show?” And then we’re going to say, “Okay God, it’s Your baby. You’re going to run it and I’m going to live by Your plan.”

Now lots of women go through the height of frustration until they come to this point of deciding that they’re going to let the husband run the show. And when they begin to find the fulfillment of the man accepting this responsibility in the marriage role, for the first time in their lives they find contentment in their marriage.

And in the greater sense, this is true spiritually. We can say, “Yes Lord, You’re my Lord. Yes, I love You. Yes, I want to do what You want me to do.”

But the problem comes in basic submission to His authority to have the right to do whatever He wants to and without question to yield to it.

That’s what Paul said in Philippians 4: “I have learned to be content.” (see Philippians 4:11)

The way he learned it was by submission to God’s plan, whether it involved prosperity or poverty. It didn’t make any difference, hunger or plenty. Now that the whole problem of authority and submission had been settled, no matter what life did to him, he did not lose his contentment.

No matter what happened to him, the responsibility was now in the hands of the higher power. And if we’re struggling with anxiety and discontentment and our heart’s broken and we’re upset and we’re fussing and fuming it’s because we have authority that doesn’t belong to us.

We need to turn this over to the Lord and say, “Lord, if it means You’re going to take this body and bury it in Africa, You’ve got the right to do it. Or if You want to let me rot in the city of Dallas, that’s great. I’ll do whatever You want to bring glory to Your name, no matter how bad or how good it is. I’m taking my hands off. It’s Your right to do what You want. And

so I'm turning it over to You."

And when we come to that point finally, of adjustment to His plan and accepting it, both with the good and the bad, we're at a point where I begin to experience contentment.

This is something that is the hardest lesson in all the world. Adjusting to God's control is one of the hardest lessons to learn.

Now it's especially hard if we have an image problem. Why? Immediately our thoughts are like this: "Boy God, You botched it up on the first go-around. I mean if You blew it in making me, I sure can't trust You with the rest of these few years I've got left." And so I'm unwilling to submit to His plan.

"God, if You meant for this to happen in my life, how in the world do You expect me to trust You to a greater degree with all of these other things that are still yet ahead?"

And so these are interrelated. If we have a problem accepting His plan, it possibly precludes the fact that we have had a problem of rejecting ourselves as one that He's created.

When we submit to His plan and find the real fulfillment, James hits on about five things when he says:

1. "Look, you show Me how much you're submitting to Me by the attitude you have when things get rough. Can you trust Me? Can you count it pure joy when you fall into varying kind

of testings, knowing that I'm in sovereign control and I can handle the circumstances? And what I've permitted is for your good. Can you thank Me for that?"

2. "When temptation comes into your life, are you willing to trust Me to give you victory over that temptation so you don't fall into sin?"

3. "Have you got a real diet for My Word? Have you got a desire to take My Word in and begin to grow and develop?"

4. "Is your capacity for love increasing?"

5. "Is there fruit coming from your life?"

These are ways we can tell whether or not we are a contented person and we're submitting to His plan—by our attitude in all of these areas and by whether or not fruit is beginning to come from our life as a person to the glory of God.

Now many times we face this frustration of adjusting to God's will. Take Jonah for instance. In four graphic chapters of his life we can see him out of whack with the will of God.

First of all, he's running away from the will of God. He's got some problems. He can't accept God's supreme right to lead Jonah where He wants him.

God in His providential dealing brings His servant back in chapter 2. And Jonah is only content in one place in all that

we read about him and that's in Jonah chapter 3.

Where is Jonah in Jonah 3? He's right in the middle of God's will and he is being blessed and prospered and he's having a fabulous experience of being used by God. He is so excited and so enthused about what God's doing in answer to his prayers and to the message he's preaching.

Then what happens in Jonah 4? Sitting outside the city, mad at God because He's not doing what He said He was going to do in Jonah 3. He's running ahead of God. Now he's frustrated.

Now he says, "God, hurry up and catch up with me. You're behind me and I'm mad. And until you get this thing straightened out, I'm just not going to be submissive."

Now that describes the picture of every one of us. Our discontentment or contentment can be known by one of four positions:

1. If we're running away from God's will for our life, we're an unhappy person and it's going to become increasingly so.
2. Maybe God, through providential dealings, is bringing us on the way back and it's a humbling, breaking experience while He does it.
3. Or maybe just maybe we're wondering what God's going to do next. Wondering what else He can do in our life, because

we're walking in His will and discovering the fulfillment of knowing that He's just capable of handling the whole deal if we had turned it over to Him a long time ago.

4. Or we're frustrated because we're individuals who are running ahead of Him. We're trying to call the plays because He isn't doing enough and we want to get it done quicker than He does.

And our adjustment to contentment can be in one of those four areas.

A pilot once said, "One thing you learn as a new pilot is that when you fly, you always believe in your instruments no matter how you feel. Your instruments will never be wrong. You can always trust them."

We are flying by instruments in the plan of our life. And naturally there is a way which we think is right to us, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

We fly by the instruments of His plan, although it seems terribly disconcerting at times, although it seems terribly foreign to the feelings which we have personally, we will end up landing on the streets of gold if we follow His plan and we're submissive to His authority to do what He wants to in our life as a person.

And after all, that's what salvation's all about. It's the Father saying, "You want to come to glory and spend it with Me? I'll

get you there if you will follow My plan.”

1. “Respond to My Son. Let Him become your Savior.”
2. “Let Me have the sovereign right to guide you there.”
3. “And while I’m guiding you there, I’m going to conform you more to the image of My Son.”

Are we willing to be submissive to the point that we can allow God to live our life for us? Are we willing to allow Him to have His way with us as a person? Totally, 100%?

1. When I accept myself, and
2. I accept His plan, and
3. I accept His provision.

This is a little bit harder one. The problem comes in accepting His provision when what we want and what we need are at two divergent points.

For instance, in James 4 he says, “You’re not getting what you want because you’re asking for them and you’re asking amiss so that you can consume them on your own desires.” (see James 4:3)

The apostle Paul says however, in Philippians 4:19, “My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in

Christ Jesus.”

In 2 Corinthians 9:8, “God is able to make all grace abound toward you so that you having all sufficiency in all things may abound in every good work.”

And many, many times in a materialistic society our needs and our wants are at divergent poles. Until we are content with food and raiment, we are going to find that we’re going to have frustration in contentment.

It’s wonderful to see when we give up all the desires for possessions. When we give up all of our wants. We can say, “Lord, You know better what I need anyway. So it’s not what I want, it’s what I need. And I’m content with whatever You provide.”

When we come in with that kind of a broken, sweet attitude, at that point He is beginning to provide what we need and it’s fantastic. In consistency with His love, He loads us with benefits.

Here’s a poetic piece helps express this so well:

One by one He took them from me,
All the things I valued most,
Until I was empty handed
Every glittering toy was lost.
And I walked earth’s highway grieving
In my rags and poverty

Till I heard a voice inviting,
“Lift those empty hands to Me.”
And I turned my empty hands toward heaven
And He filled them with a store
Of His own abundant riches
Till they could contain no more.
And at last I contemplated
With my stupid mind and soul
That God could not pour His riches
Into hands already full.
(source unknown)

When we come to that point of openness, brokenness, and receptivity to His guidance in our life, we find tremendous blessing.

We have to come to that point where we have confidence in His ability to care for all of our needs.

So these are the three things that are KEYS TO CONTENTMENT:

1. GODLINESS—easy—well, maybe, if we can implement what the Word says.
2. CONTENTMENT—that can be a hassle, but that hassle can be overcome when we accept ourselves as a pearl of great price. When we accept His purpose and plan 100%, without reservations—the good and the bad—as something from the hand of a loving Father for our good.

3. Accepting His PROVISION to meet our needs and not our wants.

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v. 11 Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to get along happily whether I have much or little.

v. 12 I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of contentment in every situation, whether it be a full stomach or hunger, plenty or want;

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v. 17 Even though the fig trees are all destroyed, and there's neither blossom left nor fruit, and though the olive crops all fail, and the fields lie barren; even if the flocks die in the fields and the cattle barns are empty,
v. 18 yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will be happy in the God of my salvation.

LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE:

LESSON #1: When we come to that point of openness, brokenness, and receptivity to His guidance in our life, we find tremendous blessing.

LESSON #2: We have to come to that point where we have confidence in His ability to care for all of our needs.

LESSON #3: There are three things that are keys to contentment: (1) godliness; (2) contentment; and (3) accepting His provision to meet our needs and not our wants.