

Contentment Is a Choice

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Contentment could be described as *being satisfied*, choosing to receive the gift of God's peace, relaxed in the midst of life, even when (perhaps *especially when*) it's challenging. It's not getting what we want; instead, it's choosing to be joyful, resting in God's provision of strength and hope. Contentment includes being mindful, intentionally living in *this* moment instead of in the past or the future. That includes paying attention to the people around us now.

Whenever we don't choose contentment, we can experience difficult emotions like sadness, hopelessness, depression, hurt, dejection, or frustration. Although those emotions are neither right nor wrong, they can indicate something *is* wrong. Challenging emotions can be viewed as invitations to learn healthy ways to face life's inevitable sorrows and disappointments, to learn the art of divine contentment.

Today, we can take three intentional steps to increase contentment:

1. **Rest:** make time for relaxation, learning to accept legitimate physical needs. In *Margin*, Richard Swenson, M.D., described four gears essential to maintaining a healthy lifestyle. The first gear, Park, is "for rest and renewal," said Dr. Swenson. Relaxation includes choosing to let your mind be content, allowing God to give you His peace amidst current challenges and concerns. The second gear, Low, is the "gear for relationships, for family and friends...the gear [that] prevents us from being distracted and nervously moving on to the next activity while still in the middle of a conversation." The third gear, Drive, is "our usual gear for work and play. This gear uses lots of energy, and the faster speed feels good because it is productive." Swenson says the fourth gear, Overdrive, "needs to be reserved for times that require extra effort."
2. **Enjoy God's creation:** time in nature can result in lavish psychological benefits, including improved attention span and mood, as well as increased activity in areas of the brain responsible for empathy and emotional stability. Being outdoors in sunshine also allows exposure to essential vitamin D, helping maintain a healthy immune system.
3. **Look at life through the lens of God's Word.** Choosing to focus on Him instead of problems, people, or other concerns, we experience "peace that passes understanding" (see Philippians 4:7), discovering the reality of His promise to be "our refuge and strength" (Psalm 46:1). With Paul, we can say, "...I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 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. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:11-14).

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