

# The Art of Divine Contentment

Marti Wibbels, MS, LMHC

Contentment is a topic that's generally ignored. If asked, most of us would say we *are* content. But the word "content" means "satisfied." When we take an honest look at our thoughts and conversations, we might acknowledge how easily we slide into an attitude of discontent. Though any form of suffering can generate difficult emotions like sadness, hopelessness, depression, hurt, dejection, or frustration, the onset of such emotions is neither right nor wrong. Instead, they often are an indication that *something* is wrong. Challenging emotions can be viewed as invitations to learn healthy ways to face life's inevitable sorrows and disappointments. They invite us to learn the art of divine contentment.

Following are some practical steps you can take to develop contentment in your daily life:

**REST:** make time for relaxation, learning to accept legitimate physical needs.

In his book, "Margin," Richard Swenson, M.D., said there are four *gears* essential to maintaining a healthy lifestyle. He described the first gear as *Park*, "for rest and renewal." The second gear, *Low*, is the "gear for relationships, for family and friends. This is 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." The fourth gear, *Overdrive*, "needs to be reserved for times that require extra effort." Unfortunately, "many in our society do not shift down from overdrive."

We don't experience contentment when we're in *overdrive*, because we don't allow ourselves to relax. Anyone can find ten minutes, even during an incredibly busy day, to enjoy God's creation, treasuring His presence. Relaxation includes choosing to let your mind be content, allowing God to give you His peace amidst current challenges and concerns.

Scheduling *extended* time in nature can result in lavish psychological benefits, such as improved attention span and mood, as well as increased activity in areas of the brain responsible for empathy and emotional stability. When we make time to contemplate on God and His intricate creation, our fears diminish and our hope increases.

Physical benefits can include a boost in energy and productivity, improved sleep, and significant stress reduction. Being outdoors in sunshine also allows exposure to essential vitamin D, helping maintain a healthy immune system.

**CHANGE YOUR FOCUS.** Have you noticed that people respond differently to similar situations? God promises to be your refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble (see Psalm 46:1). You can make intentional, moment-by-moment choices to focus on Him, developing a biblical perspective, asking God for guidance, rather than dwelling on problems, people, or concerns.

**APPLY GOD'S WORD.** Instead of letting the culture imply you're worthless if you don't have a new house, car, or purse; an advanced degree; a friend or a spouse; caring adult children, etc., today you can allow God's Word to guide you into authentic hope and peace. God promises His "peace that passes understanding" (see Philippians 4:7), but there are specific adjustments we may need to make—such as

choosing to rejoice and deciding not to worry [see Philippians 4:4-6]—before we can experience that promise.

**ASK FOR HELP** when needed. If you have experienced significant loss, you could talk with someone [a pastor, counselor, friend or support group] who is objective about your situation. Because of our brains' God-designed neuroplasticity, we can grow and change *if* we're willing to discover new options and practical ideas to apply in the midst of grief or other complexities.

**EXERCISE.** Whether taking a walk, going to the gym, swimming, or running, choosing to exercise can help reduce stress. If health problems prevent participating in certain forms of exercise, you might ask your physician for a specific workout you *can* do.

**LEARN CONTENTMENT.** An attitude of contentment can transform every day, interaction, and situation. In Philippians 4:11-14, Paul said, "...I have learned to be content in whatever 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."

"The Art of Divine Contentment," written by Thomas Watson and published in 1653, is a book that is as relevant now as it was centuries ago. Watson described contentment as a "hard lesson"... [that] "the angels [who rebelled] in heaven had not learned; they were not contented." He explained, "Discontent is to the soul, as a disease to the body," noting that Job blessed God and was content, even though his children were taken away.

Watson said, "He that hath God to be his God, is so well contented with his condition, that he doth not much care whether he hath anything else." When we suffer any kind of loss, Watson urges us to "think how many mercies you still enjoy: yet our base hearts are more discontented at one loss, than thankful for a hundred mercies."

If you want to learn how to live in authentic contentment, a free download of the book "The Art of Divine Contentment" is available at the Christian Classics Ethereal Library.

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/watson/contentment.pdf>

Many confuse contentment with complacency. But contentment is diametrically opposed to the complacent attitude Webster describes as smug "self-satisfaction." Real contentment involves consistently making healthy choices to continue growing in all areas of life—mental, physical, social, emotional and spiritual. 1 Timothy 6:6-8 describes that growth process as "... a source of immense profit, for] godliness accompanied with contentment (that contentment which is a sense of inward sufficiency) is great and abundant gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and obviously we cannot take anything out of the world; but if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content (satisfied)" [Amplified].

We can choose to look at life's numerous, multifaceted challenges as *CHAFF*. We can learn that *CHAFF* is not where we go for strength or hope; it is a vehicle for growth. In nature, chaff is the husk around a developing grain such as wheat, barley, or oats. That chaff actually protects the grain as it grows to maturity. Then, the chaff is separated from the grain, often to be thrown away. In our lives, *CHAFF* can occur in numerous forms.

## Circumstances – Health – Appearance – Family/Friends – Finances

Unlike nature's chaff, our problems and concerns can't simply be discarded. Instead, we need to learn how to walk through life's *CHAFF* by faith, not by sight, per 2 Corinthians 5:7. Amid victory or failure, difficulty, or pain, we can train ourselves not to rely on *CHAFF* for peace of mind, satisfaction, or hope.

Since circumstances, health, appearance, people and finances can change in an instant, it is vital to learn to live in God's provision rather than the world's elusive happiness. Daily we can develop a heart-attitude of gratitude, learning to see *CHAFF* as a vehicle of growth rather than the essence of life.

The *CHAFF* Chart helps you to understand that *Circumstances, Health, Appearance, Family or Friends* and/or *Finances* can all become chaff. Though each is a useful part of life; none is worthy of being your life's purpose. The chart provides a place to write down the times you rely on any form of *CHAFF* instead of on God. Through God's grace and power, you can learn to live in His provision instead of the world's temporary satisfaction. Ask God to search your heart, thanking Him that He can use *CHAFF* as a vehicle of growth in your life, then observe times you've depended on *CHAFF* and how you will choose today to rely on God for peace, hope, purpose, joy, and comfort.

<b>C</b> ircumstances	
<b>H</b> ealth	
<b>A</b> pppearance	
<b>F</b> amily or Friends	
<b>F</b> inances	