

# Contentment

vs. Covetousness

**Contentment is realizing that God has already provided everything I need for my present and future happiness.**

## Definition

In Hebrew, the word *ya'al* means “to show willingness; to undertake; to agree to, accept; to yield.” This word is used to describe a person who is resolved to do something or let something be, such as the Levite who agreed to dwell with Micah. “Micah said unto him, Dwell with me . . . . And the Levite was content to dwell with the man” (Judges 17:10–11).

In the New Testament, the words *content* and *contentment* are translated from *arkeo*, which means “to be strong enough; to be satisfied,” and *autarkeia*, which means “to need no aid or support, sufficiency of the necessities of life.”

Contentment comes as we realize that God is all we really need and that He will never leave us. We can be satisfied in Him, knowing that He is the Supplier of all our physical and spiritual needs. “Be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5).

## Contentment Is Contrary to Human Nature and Must Be Learned

We long for a better environment, assuming that with different surroundings we will achieve contentment. Yet Adam and Eve had the perfect environment, and they were not content in it. They

had perfect health, a perfect marriage, a perfect garden, and daily fellowship with God Himself, yet they soon believed the lie that God had not provided everything they needed for their present and future happiness.

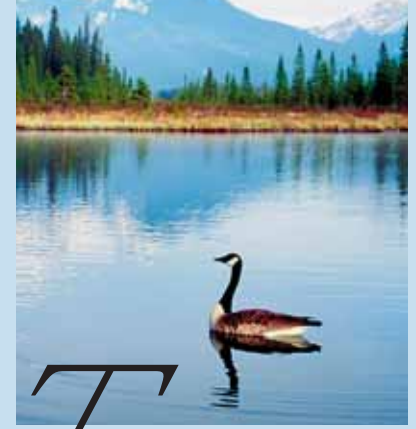
If Adam and Eve were not content in the Garden of Eden, what hope is there for us, apart from the spiritual insight that comes from God? May we, with Paul, be able to say, “Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (Philippians 4:11).

## Contentment Begins by Knowing the Purpose of Life

“The chief end of man is to know God and to enjoy him forever” (Westminster Shorter Catechism). Man was created with a God-sized vacuum, and God is the only One Who can fill that void. The Apostle Paul’s ultimate aim was to “know him [Christ], and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Philippians 3:10).

## Contentment Requires Distinguishing Between Needs and Wants

There are few things in life that are really necessary. In fact, God identified just two: food and



**T**he secret of contentment is enjoying the presence of the Lord.

*“Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”* —Psalm 16:11

**T**he alternative to contentment is boredom with worldly possessions.

*“He said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.”* —Luke 12:15



**“It is not how much we have, but how much we enjoy, that makes happiness.”**

—C. H. Spurgeon



**I**dolatry is trusting people or possessions to do for me what only God can do.

*“My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” —Philippians 4:19*



**“If I am not satisfied with what I have, I will never be satisfied with what I want.”**

—Ralph Guthrie

*“For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”*

—Philippians 4:11

**“Next to faith, this is the highest art: to be content in the calling in which God has placed you.”**

—Martin Luther

clothing. “And having food and raiment let us be therewith content” (1 Timothy 6:8). If we are not content with the basics of food and clothing, we will never be content, no matter how many things we obtain.

God has promised to provide for our needs; however, He has not assured us that we will get all our wants. We have a tendency to spend our resources on wants and then worry about our needs. Jesus warned about such concern. “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” (Matthew 6:31–33).

## Contentment Is Based on a Recognition of Mutual Need

One of the great mysteries and wonders of life is that God has a need for each one of us. He desires our fellowship, and He needs our bodies to be the temple of His Holy Spirit. He needs the members of our bodies to be the instruments of righteousness to do His will, because He chooses to work through believers.

In return, God created us to have a daily need for Him. He did not create us to survive on one meal a month but on daily food, and He taught us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11). He also pointed out that “man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

## Discontentment Begins by Desiring Self-Sufficiency

When either partner in a marriage becomes self-sufficient, the love relationship is damaged, because joy and grace come from giving and receiving. The temptation of Adam and Eve was not simply to taste some forbidden fruit but to be self-sufficient and no longer need God. The subtle serpent told them that if they ate the fruit, they would “be as gods” and be able to decide for themselves good and evil. (See Genesis 3:1–6.)

## Discontentment Leads to Covetousness

When a brother complained about not receiving his fair share of an inheritance, Jesus said, “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15).

## Covetousness Produces Idolatry

If we desire what God has not given to us but what He has given to others, we are guilty of coveting. This is a violation of the tenth commandment: “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s” (Exodus 20:17).

When we expect from possessions or people what only God can give, we turn them into idols and become guilty of idolatry. For example, if we expect security



from money, we make money an idol, because only God can give security. Likewise, if we expect fulfillment from wealth or expensive possessions, we make them idols. The same is true if we look to food or diets alone for health.

## Contentment Is Achieved by Exchanging Things for More of Christ

Someone has wisely observed that Jesus is all we need, but we will not know it until He is all we have. Paul understood this truth by exchanging things for more of Christ. “Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” (Philippians 3:8).

In one sense, life is a continual exchange. We exchange time on the job for money. We then exchange money for food, and we exchange food for strength. A wise person will exchange things of lesser value for things of greater value. Jim Elliot said, “He is no fool, who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.”

## Contentment Allows Us to Gain Things of Greater Value

Contentment is setting our affections on eternal treasures rather than on temporal possessions. It is experiencing the qualities of Godliness without the distraction of earthly cares. Jesus warned about the conflict between temporal things and eternal riches when

He spoke of the seed falling into different types of soil: “He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful” (Matthew 13:22).

### Personal Evaluation

#### How content are you?

- In what specific ways do you enjoy the presence of the Lord?
- Do you enjoy spending time with your family?
- Are you making practical use of the possessions that have been entrusted to you?
- Have you set your affections on getting things that you think will make your life happier?
- Do you become bitter when your possessions are damaged or stolen?
- When damage comes to your life, possessions, or family, do you have the response of Job? “The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21).
- Do you rejoice in the wealth of things that money cannot buy—such as health, freedom, a good name, a clear conscience, and eternal salvation—more than temporal possessions?
- Do you believe that God has given you all you need?



The more I release earthly possessions, the more I can grasp eternal treasures.

*“For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.” —1 Timothy 6:7*

**“Discontentment makes rich men poor while contentment makes poor men rich.”**

—Benjamin Franklin



The **deer mouse** displays contentment in its ability to make its home almost anywhere, making itself comfortable with whatever is available.