

Proverbs: Skillful Living - Contentment

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[0 : 00] Both the poor and the rich have the same affliction. They both want more wealth. Both the rejected and the accepted have the same affliction.

Both want more recognition. Both the weak and the strong have the same affliction. They both want more power. Both the hungry in the field have the same affliction.

They want more sustenance. As we talk about contentment this morning, I think it's important that as Proverbs teaches us and that we ought to recognize that contentment is a virtue for all.

That contentment doesn't discriminate based on the circumstances one finds themselves in. That is equally accessible to any and all in every place, every stage, every face.

And Proverbs talks about contentment in the context of what we possess or do not possess. And after putting together, collecting and archiving, if you will, all of the texts in Proverbs, all of the quips, the wisdom sayings, the passages on what contentment is, you bring them all together and it's clear that there is a link between possession of some things and the contentment we hold in our hearts.

[1 : 37] What we value often determines what we possess and what we possess often reveals what we value. One songwriter puts it this way, you possess your possessions or they possess you.

The toddler wants the toy the other, wants the toy the other child has, the actor wants the role another actor has, the couple wants the house they can't afford, the romantic wants the person they cannot woo.

Regardless of what phase or area or piece of of contentment we all might experience, one thing is true, it is a common affliction to be discontented in a life, in a world that is broken and unfulfilling.

So the question I want us to wade into as we start our study today is this, why do we struggle with contentment? Why? One, because we always want more.

Two, because we value what is temporal and three, because we lack gratitude. All three of these points, always wanting more, valuing what is temporal, lacking gratitude, perfectly summarized the book of Ecclesiastes.

[2 : 58] Who was also written, as we know the Proverbs written in large part by the man Solomon the king, who wrote an entire book of Ecclesiastes on a life that was filled with wanting more, valuing what was temporal and lacking gratitude and perspective.

And at the end of this great book, after all of the things he tasted and experienced, he comes to the conclusion that all is vanity. And there's only one thing that really grants true contentment in this life, and it's a very end of the book, the last thing, the dying breath, if you will, he says love God and fear his commandments.

Fear him, follow his commandments, contentment will find you. So as we come into the work of Proverbs, I want us to see, as God wants us to see, that contentment is a real experience of what it means to be human in a fallen world.

But overcoming contentment is God's plan for our lives through what he has done and provided. So we're going to look at four different Proverbs for sections, if you will.

There is 20 plus, but I wanted to whittle it down to find the core thread and theme of what Proverbs is trying to do when it's teaching us about contentment. So there's two main points for this morning, and this hopefully will be simplified down just to these two and we'll spend a lot of time in them.

[4 : 27] The first one is this, Proverbs clearly teaches us that discontentment arises when we want what we do not have. Discontentment arises when we want what we do not have.

Proverbs 30, verse 7 and 9 is going to be the first section we're going to be in this morning. So please turn with me to Proverbs 30, verse 7 to 9. It'll be on the screen as well.

These are the words of a man named Agour, and this man was a writer in Proverbs, and he has immense wisdom for us this morning. Let's read it together.

Proverbs 30, 7 to 9, two things I ask of you, deny them not to me before I die. Remove far from me falsehood and lying and give me neither poverty nor riches.

Feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, Who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.

[5 : 32] These are the words of a wise man that has taken the time to write down a key essential piece of what it means to be content and the explanation and the laying out of what is behind being discontented.

And he's speaking to the Lord here hypothetically, and he says, There's two things I ask of you, Lord, listen, hear me. And here's what I ask. I'm summarizing here. He says this, if I have too much, I will forget God's providence.

So give me not riches, Lord. And secondly, if I have too little, I will forget God's commandments. So give me not too little, Lord.

This is a man who is at touch with his own brokenness and temptations. He sees inward the heart that wanders from God and he asks the Lord in humility, please, Lord, help me to be content.

Because if I have food that is needful, I'll eat it, I'll be full, and what will I do? I'm full. I watched the game, I ate the food, I had the fellowship, I had all the good stuff, and now I sit back and I say, Life is great.

[6 : 49] Who needs God? I've got it. I'm happy. I'm content right now in this moment because of the food that I filled my stomach with. Who needs God? But also, he says, Lord, please, don't give me poverty, because if I have too little, I know I will be tempted to forsake you.

And I will be tempted to do what is wrong. What we learned from Proverbs 30, 7-9, is that discontentment arises when we want what we do not have.

But the problem isn't just having too little or too much, it's actually bigger than that, which is what he's saying. And I want to ask us, just as Agour does to us, how are the values of the world discontenting us?

It is never good enough to be just good, you have to be the best. That's a message the world teaches a lot. And it's a message I've believed as a competitor and as an athlete.

I have often competed in sport events and I've not placed first. And I've gone back to myself and said, you failed and you're not good enough.

[8 : 09] And I think that even in the sports world, that outlet can come in every phase of our lives. I've parented, but I've not parented well enough, I'm not the perfect parent, I've failed.

I've not gotten straight A's, I must be a failure. And we set the bar so high that we become discontented with our own standards that we impose.

But the world is also teaching us this, that success is often measured by the size of your bank account, the number of followers on your social media, your highest earned degree, or your position on the workplace hierarchy.

Suddenly teaching us that the more we have at these things, the higher we are in a workplace, the higher the degree we've earned, the more followers we have, the bigger the size of the bank account, that surely contentment will follow and it will finally be happy.

But what the Proverbs teach us, again, is that discontentment arises not just out of our circumstances, but discontentment arises from our hearts and the way we perceive that which we have or do not have.

[9 : 18] So discontentment arises when we want what we do not have. We're going to look at three Proverbs now, you can turn with me to Proverbs 23, verse 4 to 5.

And there's three specific examples in life that are used to talk about discontentment and what brings those things about. And what's interesting about all three of the things we're going to see here is they all fall under the umbrella of wanting what we don't have.

So Proverbs casts this big category, big umbrella of you will be discontent if you want what you don't have. And underneath that umbrella are three tangible examples.

And the first one is greed. Proverbs 23, verse 4 to 5 says, do not toil to acquire wealth. Be discerning enough to desist when your eyes light on it is gone and suddenly it sprouts wings flying like an eagle toward heaven.

Sounds beautiful, sounds poetic. The eagle flying to heaven. We know that the wise man who wrote this intended it to be a warning that as soon as you gather the wealth that your heart has desired, it flies away.

[10:43] And we're left empty. So greed, doing all that we can to acquire wealth in order that we might satisfy our hearts and take our fill of the things of the earth.

The exact measure of expectation we put into a thing to make us content is the exact measure of disappointment we will experience when it departs.

Put your highest hopes and expectations in the Lord therefore because he will never depart. This is what the Lord has told us from the start of the book to the end of the book. Back in Genesis, in Joshua and on through the history of Israel and now to the church when Jesus leaves he ascends into heaven, will be with you to the end of the age.

To Joshua, take courage because that will never leave you nor forsake you, and with you. He never departs his people. So the more we put our hopes and our expectations in the Lord, he is faithful always to fulfill those and to give forth contentment that's rooted in his presence and his power in our lives.

Greed, an example of wanting what we don't have. Secondly is envy. There's a Proverb in Proverbs 23 just a little bit later in verse 17 to 18.

[12:06] Proverbs 23, 17 to 18. This is envy. Here's what it says, verse 17, let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the Lord all the day.

Surely there is a future and your hope will not be cut off. Here's the context and the place in which he means this. The envious sinners just look at what has been achieved, what has been gathered, what has been built up by the life of someone who lives for their own pleasure and their own contentment and their own gain, apart from the Lord.

And here's the reality, apart from the Lord, you can acquire a whole lot of fame, success, money in the eyes of the world.

And what the writer is saying is let your heart not envy those people. Don't envy the money and the wealth of the richest person. Don't envy the fame of the number one followed social media account. Don't envy the lifestyles and the possessions and the materiality of what people might have on this earth. Don't envy anything about those who are without God, because as we envy the things that those who are without God, we will eventually fall into the trap of basing our values, putting our expectations in that which is not from God and is empty.

[13:35] So envy, ingreed, envy, also a condition of wanting what we do not have. And then lastly, Proverbs talks about lust.

Proverbs 5, verse 15 to 18. An analogy here is given of marriage and the beautiful, covenantal intimacy between a man and a woman.

And it warns us. Verse 15, drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets, let them be for yourself alone and not for strangers with you.

Let your fountain be blessed and rejoice in the wife of your youth. Lust. Another outpouring of what we, when we want what we do not have.

The woman that is beautiful that I don't have, I'm a lust. I want her. The guy that is so charming that I really, really want in my life. I will, I want them.

[14:43] And here's what the Proverbs is saying, especially in the context of those who are in marriage, even though it applies to all of us. Drink water from your own cistern. God has planted a well in your life from which you go and you draw beautiful intimacy and sexual fulfillment from.

And he's done that by giving you a wife or giving you a husband to have that intimacy, to have that fellowship, to enjoy God and as you have that intimacy and fellowship in your marriage, you are building a witness of love that shines the love of the Gospel forth, that people see the love of your marriage and they say, incredible.

The Lord is good and he is faithful because I see the faithfulness of this couple and their love for one another. And God has given them a well that they can go to inside their marriage for their own intimacy, love, affection, connection, enjoyment.

And that's what marriage should be in and is from the Lord. But here's the warning. Don't take your well and put it somewhere else. Or worse, don't go to someone else as well.

The implication is that the water that you take from another person's well will end up being bitter.

And even elsewhere in Proverbs 7 and others, it talks about how the one who gives way to the harlot and gives themselves over thinking it's just a moment of fun, it will be their destruction.

[16:14] Meaning envy, lust, greed, all three of these things that the Proverbs warn us about. They teach us that when we want what we do not have, we will inevitably be discontented and possibly destroyed.

So, discontentment arises when we want what we do not have, but secondly, and here's the hope, the beauty, the target for us is this. Contentment arises when we are grateful for what we have been given.

Contemplation arises when we are grateful for what we have been given. That's clearly what the Proverbs have been teaching me and I believe are teaching us. So now let's look at three Proverbs back to back to back.

And all three of these clearly illustrate to us that our hearts, our souls, our bodies, all of who we are, are content in the Lord, satisfied in the Lord when we are exercising gratitude for what we have been given.

First is Proverbs 15, 16. And it says this, better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it.

[17:28] Better is huge key word here, little. Better to have almost nothing and have the fear of God than to have great treasure and trouble.

Proverbs 16, 8 says something very similar. Better is a little, same thing, with righteousness than great revenues with injustice.

And then Proverbs 19, 23. The fear of the Lord leads to life and whoever has it rests satisfied and he will not be visited by harm.

All three of these verses are highlighting something for the people of God. And it's this, even if you have nothing material, even if you have the tiniest portion of food, the tiniest house, the tiniest bed, the tiniest everything that you could possibly have or even nothing at all.

Here's what the Proverbs are teaching us. That if you have the fear of the Lord, if you have the righteousness that comes from the Lord, you will be satisfied.

[18:44] And this is a powerful message because it speaks to the affluent in the world. It speaks to those that have nothing in the world. It speaks to the high, to the low, to the ruler, to the servant.

It gives hope to the downtrod and end the lofty, the powerful. And it gives hope to all believers everywhere, regardless of their context of affluence or persecution or need or want or having all things supplied just like the passage just read.

And I remember a couple of weeks, a while back now, about four or five years ago, we took the youth group along with another church. We went down to Tijuana, which is one of the poorest regions in all of Mexico.

And we would go through these towns and houses that are built out of whatever they could find and we would give food and we'd pray and we'd read Scripture with them.

And I remember just the lessons that came out of that experience as we tried to do our best to love people and share the gospel in places of hopelessness and desperation. And seeing, seeing on so many people's faces what seemed to me to be a contentment that I lack as I go back to my wealth and affluence.

[20:08] That I have nothing and because I have nothing, there's hope to be had, but especially for those who were in the Lord, in Christ that we met and talked with, it was incredible to see that their perception of what makes them content was never in what was material.

It was always in who is Lord of their life. And it's a beautiful, beautiful concept.

And what these three Proverbs back to back to back are teaching is that if you have nothing but you have God, if you have nothing but you have a fear of God, if you have nothing but you have righteousness of conduct in life, then your way will be filled with satisfaction.

So what arises from these verses is a built-in application for each one of us. Every one of us here has experienced discontentment. Everyone in here right now, I would say, whatever aspect of your life, maybe large or small, has absolute areas where we feel it's not enough.

I'm not satisfied. I'm not happy. My job isn't what I thought it was going to be when I applied. My marriage is difficult and the person I'm married to isn't who I thought they were.

[21:34] My social circle, my friends, they're just not meeting my needs. Whatever the area of discontentment you might be experiencing this morning, here's what the Proverbs suggest to us.

How do we become content? We become content with what we do possess and we become content with what we do not possess.

And the solution to both of those is gratitude. Notice, better is a little. Better is a little. If you have the fear of the Lord, if you have righteousness, if you have these things, your view of God is right. He is Lord. He is God. I am His child. Even though I may have little, I see my God and I hope and exult in Him.

I'm grateful for what the Lord has given. So for what we do possess, how do we become content to not want more than what we possess and for what we don't possess, what's lacking in our minds, in our lives, how do we become content with what we think should be existing in our lives?

[22 : 51] The answer is gratitude. To be thankful, to love the Lord and to see what He has provided that I might have perspective. For those of us who are discontented with what we do possess, I have, but it's not enough.

Here's the question. Here's the prayer. I would encourage you to pray. Lord, you have given me fill in the blank. I trust your providence.

The spouse, the kids, the house, the job. Fill in the blank. All of that you have given me. And we need to pray. We need to train our hearts to be grateful and trust in His providence, that He has given exactly what He has given and He has not given exactly what He has not given.

And to see what He has given to say, Lord, I trust your providence. It really is a test of our view of how good God is. You have given and I see and I worship and I am thankful for what you have given.

So three questions I would encourage each person in here to ask. Maybe this week, maybe tonight, maybe this afternoon, maybe you go to lunch with a friend after church. I encourage you to do this individually and collectively with close friends and with the church.

[24 : 14] The three questions to kind of guide us and temper our discontentment in this area.

When we are discontented of what we do possess, three questions. One, what has the Lord given me?

Create the list. I spent time doing this last night and, man, after about 30 items, I was overwhelmed because I'd realized this is the start of the list.

I could spend another hour making more, but it only took 30 items for me to say, okay. The lesson is now rooting in my heart, Lord.

We have to recognize what the Lord has given and make that list. And then, secondly, answer this question after you made your list. Why has He given me these things? To be able to say the Lord has given, here's what I have.

And now, Lord, why have you given these? I'm going to spend effort in my mind and in my heart to look at these things and answer, why have you given to me?

[25 : 14] And as we do that exercise, we come to our third question, which is how can I rest in His providence? You've given? I see why. I know why you've given these now, Lord.

And I want to rest in exactly what you've supplied. And this results in heart-level contentment.

Through the power of the mind and the power of the Spirit in our lives to do this exercise, our hearts become truly content with the providence of God.

But secondly, how do we become content with what we do not possess? I don't have this, but I need this to be happy or satisfied. I would encourage you to pray this prayer, Lord, you haven't given me blank, and I trust your sovereignty.

You haven't given me the promotion that I've been working hard towards. You haven't given me the spouse that I've been praying for. You haven't given me fill in the blank. And whatever you fill in the blank with, give that to God in recognition of His great sovereignty.

And so three questions for this. When we are not content with what we do not possess, one, ask why hasn't the Lord given me this?

[26 : 34] So these are just the negative of the previous questions. Why hasn't the Lord given me this? And this is a very difficult question. I tried doing this for all of the things on my list, the list I created for the things that I feel like I need but I don't have.

And to ask this question was painful. Because in answering this question, I had to recognize, the Lord hasn't given me this, maybe because I want it selfishly.

Or maybe because He has something better. But this is the perspective that the Proverbs is pointing us to. Better to have little than to fear the Lord and have anything you want.

This is what fear of the Lord and righteousness looks like. It's trusting in God's sovereignty that He knows and directs the path better than I could ever walk it. Proverbs 16, 9.

And then secondly, ask why hasn't He given me these things? Why? Again, maybe because I'm selfish, maybe because there's something better.

[27 : 35] And then the third question is how can I trust His sovereignty? Lord, you haven't given me this? I think I know why now, Lord. I'm submitting over to you. I fear you as the God that knows what is truly best and is an all-powerful God.

And now, Lord, I trust your sovereignty. And again, the result here is heart-level contentment. And as we do these exercises, what we will find is that our minds and our hearts are becoming more aligned with God's values, which is Him, knowing Him, having Him, being directed by Him, living with Him in Christian community, living with God in daily communion in His Word and through prayer and all of the blessings that we've been given through God, we will learn more and more that that is what matters in life.

And that all of the other things which are good and important food, job, protection, satisfaction, all of the things that we are also given to, those are extensions from who God is and the view of fear of the Lord.

Which is why Paul says, and we can join him, in everything, whether you eat or drink, do all for the glory of God. No matter what it is, fear of the Lord directs.

And so lastly, we've seen that discontentment arises when we want what we do not have and contentment arises when we are grateful for what we do have or haven't given.

[29 : 08] Why then? How in the world can I stand up here and can Scripture tell us that God, God is the only sufficient lasting source of contentment?

Because God has supplied exactly what we need. Grace, mercy, love, acceptance, life through the Gospel.

This is what we exactly need. Recreated for communion with God, fellowship with Him, and sin broke that.

And Jesus comes to restore that. And the Gospel, the good news of Jesus, perfect life, sacrificial death, victorious resurrection, that through repentance and belief we come to God and we come to Jesus and we give ourselves over to Him and we receive grace, mercy, love, acceptance, and life through His Son, the exact thing we needed.

That's the Gospel. So contentment starts with being thankful for what I have. And church, here's what we have.

[30 : 30] We have Jesus Christ, the only one who satisfies the Son of God.

Now just two days ago, I watched painfully as my Dodgers lost 11 to 0 to the St. Louis Cardinals. But I can honestly say it was my favorite Dodger loss in the history of my life.

Because in it, one of the greatest baseball players ever played the game, Albert Poo Halls, hit two home runs to tally his lifetime total to 700.

There's four players that have ever hit 700 home runs in a season. Three legitimate, but four. I don't like Barry Bonds. Barry Bonds, Willie Mays, excuse me, Barry Bonds, Hank Aaron, Babe Ruth, and now Albert Poo Halls.

Listen to this. When he was on the Dodgers, I remember reading quotes from other players about how he would pray for people in the clubhouse. He would give big hugs.

[31 : 41] He was known for his hugs. They call him T.O. Albert, Uncle Albert. He'd give hugs. He would pray for people. And everyone just loved this guy. So I did some digging. And man, this guy isn't just a big hugger and a big prayer.

He is a big Christ follower. He loves Jesus. So much so, his wife started a ministry to reach kids. In foreign countries who have little to reach them for Christ through baseball. Now this man, Albert Poo Halls, hit his 700 home run. He hit it deep into the stands and the fan caught it and started screaming, Yeah, I got it.

And everyone's thinking the same thing. That guy is good for the rest of his life. He could sell that ball for no joke, over a million dollars. 700th baseball. Albert Poo Halls is going to want that back. He's going to send his mantle forever to say, I have 700 home runs and here it is. Everyone's thinking the same thing. And this guy is freaking out. Hit the jackpot.

[32 : 41] So after the game, somebody said, all right, how are you going to get your ball back? Are you excited to get the ball? Are you going to have to do some negotiating? Are you looking forward to that? Here's what Albert Poo Halls said, quote.

Souvenir's are for the fans. I don't have any problem if they want to keep it. They probably should. If they want to give it back, that's great, but at the end of the day, my focus is not on material things. And the response to this comma, everyone was saying, wow, that's incredible. He's a great guy. But the number one response to this comma I saw over and over and over again was, man, he doesn't focus on material things because really, really cares about his legacy.

He doesn't need a baseball. It's written. That's why he said that. Everyone was jumping to the conclusion. He cares more about his legacy in Hall of Fame, which he's now done as a 700 homerun hitter. He doesn't care about the ball.

He cares about his legacy. Wow, that's amazing. Christians, let's not be confused. I think I know why he said that. It's a ball. It's made of cork and string and leather.

[33 : 44] Whatever. This is a great illustration of contentment. I don't need a ball to sit on my mandal for people to look and say, wow, you're amazing.

He is Christ. And so what is God given as the source of our last incantment? It is the quenching, satisfying drink of the gospel.

In John 4, there's a woman, a Samaritan woman that goes to a well to draw water. And Jesus is sitting there. You guys know the story well. And it says that the woman of Samaria came to draw water.

And we know from context that this woman had five husbands. Jesus points this out that just like all of us, she's no different or any worse. The Samaritan woman demonstrates the discontentment that we all have.

She was trying to satisfy her thirst for intimacy and meaningful relationship with another lover. And then another lover. And then another lover. And here's what I want to ask us.

[34 : 45] What ways are we drawing water from bottom doubt, pointless wells that give us water of disappointment?

Where do the wells we're trying to draw from that will never satisfy? And she says this to Jesus, sir, the well is deep. The well is deep.

And I believe that our hearts given over to sin in the effects of the fall mean that the desires of our hearts are deep too. For the wrong things. But they also can be deep for the right things.

And this is what Jesus taps into. She tells this woman, the thirst, the water I give will forever quench. They'll never thirst again.

Sir, give me the water. She says she wants it. And then Jesus drops true worshipers of God worshiping spirit and truth.

[35 : 43] Only the hope of the gospel can truly satisfy us. Believer, nonbeliever. Satisfaction is found in Jesus and his work and his personhood to save us and redeem us.

And one of my favorite candy bars of all time is a Snickers bar. You guys know where I'm going here. On the underside of the Snickers bar, you turn it over. What do you see? Satisfies. And I can tell you, I love Snickers.

If I eat a Snickers bar, I am truly 100% satisfied for about 30 seconds. Right?

Well, here's the truth of the matter when it comes to Scripture, what Jesus is doing in John 4. The word satisfied, or satisfies, excuse me, is etched onto the glass of the living water that we take and we drink of Jesus.

That Jesus, when we drink of Him, when we believe in Him, we trust in Him, we take all that He has offered and given through His life, death and resurrection. We drink of that cup and we are satisfied forever.

[36 : 48] This is the hope He had for the Samaritan woman. This is the hope that we have as well. Are you thirsty this morning?

For something that reaches the deepest part of your soul and satisfies you. If you have never believed or trusted in Jesus, Jesus is proclaiming to you the same thing He told the Samaritan woman.

He quenches thirst forever at a heart-deep level. For those of us who say, I have believed in Jesus, but I still feel discontented, let's not forget about the satisfaction that that living water produces.

Because what Jesus says is in Him this living water will spring up a well of eternal life. That instead of drinking, going back and drinking and drinking, instead Jesus plants a spring of water in our hearts that never stops flowing.

Get this picture? It'll never stop flowing. My life, my joy, my grace, my mercy, everything that He offers as our Savior and our Messiah and as our God, it continues to flow in our hearts.

[38 : 07] And that's the contentment that we tap into. We drink of it, which is why, as Josh read earlier, Philippians 4, this is why Paul says, I know how to be brought low.

I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. And here's our context. Here's our high point. Here's our key. Here's what this verse is speaking to. It's contentment, brothers and sisters. It's contentment. Here it is. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

I can be content in any circumstance because I know Jesus. And Jesus in me refines and reforms my thoughts, my intentions, my desires, and gives me a peace at a heart and soul level that allows me to see all of the circumstances in my life through the lens of God is enough.

That's what it means for Christ to strengthen us, to choose Him when our hearts feel discontented and recognize every perfect, exact need that we have is met at the cross.

[39 : 24] Be quenched, O weary traveler. Lord, we thank You for this morning. We pray that as we sing now and we respond and worship that it would be from the overflowing of the spring that You've planted within our hearts of the gospel, that the grace and mercy we've received, the love we've received from You, Lord, that as now as we sing it would continue to flow, it would bubble up, and it would overflow through the expression of singing to You.

We recognize You as the true source of contentment, the satisfying water that will never again cause us to thirst. Jesus, You are it, and Jesus, we give our lives to You in contentment, choosing You over all other things.

Amen.