

Outline_Heart of Discontent

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The Heart of Discontent- A Biblical Counseling Perspective

Scripture: Selected

Key words: Contentment, discontentment, complaining, grumbling, providence, sovereignty

Sermon Audio: Discontent is something most Christians (and others) struggle with from time to time. If it's chronic it leads to even greater problems. The Old Testament provides us with a case study in discontent as well as a warning if we do not seek to put off discontent. The New Testament gives us the solution as to how to put off discontentment and put on contentment regardless of circumstances. In this two week study Pastor Bruce will explore both aspects.

I. Introduction

[Big Rock Candy Mountain](#)

A. Big Rock Candy Mountain

1. A hobo's fantasy
2. Our fantasy world
3. John MacArthur's perspective
 - a. "Frankly, most people don't experience [contentment]. Most Christians don't experience it, obviously, to the degree that God desires us to. We tend to be a very discontent people. And I have this sort of personal theory that the more you have the more discontent you become." John MacArthur, Commentary on 1 Timothy
 - b. "Prosperity has done more damage to believers than has adversity." (Warren Wiersbe)
 - c. The more prosperous one is, the less one needs to rely upon God. It may one of the reasons Jesus said the prosperous have a hard time getting into heaven.
 - d. Some facts to support #3
 - 1) Do you have sufficient food, decent clothes, a home that keeps you warm and some kind of reliable transportation?
 - a) Top 15% of the world's most prosperous
 - 2) Do you have some savings, two cars in any condition, a nice variety of clothes and own your own home?
 - a) Top 5% of the world's prosperous.
 - e. Let's say a person works from age 25-65 and earns only \$25,000 a year and has no other source of income. That's about \$1,000,000 to manage and for most of us that's still a lot of money.

- 1) Yet we'd not consider ourselves "rich"
 - a) Because we compare ourselves with the 1% the Democrats want to tax to death.
 - b) The fat cat is always the other guy
 - c) We're better off than most of the world, yet struggle with discontentment.

4. Adamic Discontentment

- a. --Our solution is to find regular communion with something outside of ourselves in order to be saved from ourselves. Before we found Christ we got our fixes from many different things. Like a bee flitting from one flower to the next, we could not be satisfied.--Rick Thomas
 - 1) This is why whether rich or poor we struggle with discontentment.
 - 2) This is why whether healthy or ill we struggle with discontentment.
 - 3) This is why there is discontentment in good marriages and discontentment in marriage not so good.
 - 4) This is why the grass always seems to be greener somewhere else.
 - 5) Discontentment cuts across life in all aspects and when it becomes chronic it leads to even more problems. Being disappointed with God is no way to live.

B. Achieving Contentment the Pagan way

1. Stoicism

- a. The stoics believed destructive emotions resulted from errors in judgment and that person of moral and intellectual perfection would not suffer from destructive emotions.
- b. The most famous Stoic was the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius who wrote a book called Meditations.
 - 1) "You have the power to strip away many superfluous troubles located wholly in your judgment, and to possess a large room for yourself embracing in thought the whole cosmos, to consider everlasting time, to think of the rapid change in the parts of each thing, of how short it is from birth until dissolution, and how the void before birth and that after dissolution are equally infinite" (Marcus Aurelius entry by John Sellars in the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy)
 - 2) One ancient Stoic writer, Epictetus said, "Begin with a cup or a household utensil, if it breaks say, 'I don't care.' Go on to a horse or a pet dog, if anything happens to it say, 'I don't care.' Go on to yourself and if you're

hurt or injured in any way say, 'I don't care.' And if you go on long enough and if you try hard enough you'll come to a state when you can walk your nearest and dearest suffer and die and say, 'I don't care.'" (MacArthur, sermon on Phil. 4:11-13)

3) "No fear"

4) Take away your opinion, and there is taken away the complaint. (M.A.)

- c. Stoicism was a pagan philosophy that taught people to endure hardship without negative emotion and thus experience contentment.
- d. To be content then would mean to the Greeks to be satisfied and sufficient and to seek nothing more than one has and to suck up the circumstances in Stoic contentment. (MacArthur, 1 Tim. Commentary)

2. Epicureanism (chief rival to stoicism)

- a. Epicureanism, which taught that the universe was subject to the random movements of atoms, and life should be lived to achieve psychological contentment and the absence of pain. (Mikalson, Jon D. (2006), "Greek Religion - Continuity and Change in the Hellenistic Period", in Bugh, Glenn Richard, The Cambridge Companion to the Hellenistic World, Cambridge University Press, ISBN 0-521-53570-0)
- b. Seems to be the view of many modern Americans! Be happy! Self-help!

3. Cynicism

- a. As reasoning creatures, people could gain happiness by rigorous training and by living in a way which was natural for humans, rejecting all conventional desires for wealth, power, sex, and fame. Instead, they were to lead a simple life free from all possessions.
- b. If one could liberate oneself from conventional desires they would experience contentment.

4. Self-sufficiency

- a. The Greek philosophers used the word contentment to mean "self-sufficiency." The person who was content didn't come apart at the seams due to outside circumstances.
- b. Contentment in the biblical sense can mean the same thing except that the self-sufficiency is not mustered up from within.
- c. The state of being content would be, "A sweet quiet, gracious frame of spirit which freely submits and delights in God's fatherly disposition in every condition." Wayne Mack
 - 1) The pagan is self-sufficient in himself or herself and so is god, while the Christian is self-sufficient in Christ.

5. Counseling for Contentment (psychotherapy)

- a. Our mission is based on the philosophy that children, families, couples and adults enjoy and desire connection with one another and contentment in their lives. Our counseling can help people develop healthy, securely-attached relationships, learn to communicate one's needs effectively, manage and express emotions clearly, and feel empowered to tackle life's many challenges AND rejoice in life's gifts. The human spirit is incredibly strong and everyone has the capability to make their life better and overcome their struggles through compassion, understanding and connection toward themselves and others.

C. NT temporal perspective (in order of NT appearance)

1. Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages." (Luke 3:14 ESV)
 - a. Soldiers associated with Tax collectors
 - b. Notoriously dishonest soldiers and tax collectors (extortionists-Zaccheus)
 - c. Be content and be honest
 - d. Good counsel for a disciple of Christ.
2. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:10 ESV)
 - a. Enduring what comes our way for the "sake of Christ"
 - b. Counting all as loss for the sake of Christ
 - 1) But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ [9] and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—(Philippians 3:7-9 ESV)
 - c. The motive to endure hardship of any sort is "for the sake of Christ" not psychological well-being although that certainly can be the result.
3. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. (Philippians 4:11-12 ESV)
 - a. Contentment is "learned"
 - 1) Gumazo principle course correction (2 Tim. 3:16-17)

- 2) Unlearning discontent responses in life
 - 3) Learning content responses in life
 - 4) Struggle until it's learned and God always provides the necessary workshop
4. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. (1 Timothy 6:7-8)
 - a. Eternal perspective trumps the temporal perspective
 - b. Our home is elsewhere
 - c. Striving for sanctification as God works in us (Php. 2:12-13)
 5. Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5-6 ESV)
 - 1) Antidote to discontent is trusting in God's provision.
 - a) Deut. 31:6, 8
 - b) Josh. 1:5
 - 2) Verse 6 cited from Psa 118:6 and means more than just trusting God for finances esp in light of persecution and the resulting hardships

II. Case Study in Discontent

A. A Mountain top experience

1. Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses. (Exodus 14:31 ESV)
2. God did the impossible. He delivered them from Pharaoh and destroyed his army.
3. Should be smooth sailing from here on in!

B. Exodus 15

1. Ex. 15:1-21: Quite the joyful song, what could go wrong?
 - a. When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; therefore it was named Marah. And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" (Exodus 15:23-24 ESV)
 1. Grumbled, complaining, murmuring, against Moses.

- 2) First sign of hardship and they doubt God's presence or ability to provide.
2. First take away: Discontentment comes when we focus on what we lack.
 - a. Has not God promised to meet our needs? Matt. 6:31-34)
 - b. Matt. 6:33 sets a seeking the kingdom priority first and trusting God for everything else.
 - c. A strategic principle to grasp to defeat worry, fear and anxiety.
 - 1) God is patient and meets their needs with "sweet water." (Ex. 15:25)

Useful exercise: I'd be happy and content if only

A statement like that reveals your heart condition. It's what you want your Big Rock Candy Mountain to look like. The more you demand it the more discontent you become.

3. Second take away" Discontentment is directed against God (Ex. 16)
 - a. And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." (Exodus 16:2-3 ESV)
 - 1) Selective memory that does not recall the bondage
 - 2) And boast they were well fed in Egypt
 - 3) Accuse the leadership of wanting them to starve-just a bit irrational!
 - b. Not the first or last time they made this complaint.
 - 1) Ex. 14:12
 2. Num. 20:3-5
 - c. "would that we had died by the hand of the Lord..."
 - 1) Consistently revealing a lack of faith in God, who he is and what he has promised!
 - d. Leadership sets them straight
 - 1) and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against the LORD. For what are we, that you grumble against us?" [8] And Moses said, "When the LORD gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the LORD has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him—what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD." (Exodus 16:7-8 ESV)

- 2) Consistent response to hardship was to question God's motives and to doubt His power and goodness.

4. How about us?

a. How do react to difficulties?

- 1) Anger?
- 2) Anxiety?
- 3) Depressed?
- 4) Self-pity (why did this happen to me?)
- 5) Blaming leadership?
- 6) Blaming God?

b. Do you believe you can control your response?

- 1) Has God taken care of you thus far?
- 2) Has God not saved you from eternal death and slavery to sin?
- 3) Can your response be (even if a sinful response is first), "Lord, although this situation is upsetting I will trust you to supply the wisdom and resources I need."

C. Trusting God

1. God will provide manna (Ex. 16:12). He has a plan.

- a. God is patient once more and meets their needs with manna.
- b. Take away #3: Hardship teaches us to trust God

This will become even more apparent as we study Paul and his responses to life next week.

1. Some will not learn

- a. All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" So Moses cried to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." (Exodus 17:1-4 ESV)

- 1) A grumbling, complaining, murmuring disposition as a whole.

2) Grass is always greener in Egypt (selective memory again)

a) Grass is greener mentality is more responsible for discontentment than perhaps any other reason.

b. Leadership totally frustrated!

III. The Consequences of Discontent

A. Take away #4: Discontent distorts the past and destroys the present.

1. Similar to the grass is greener thinking so is thinking you were really happier in the past.

a) Was I really content back then?

b) Wasn't there always something else I wanted?

B. Beware the Idolatry of Discontentment

1. Discontentment easily becomes chronic

a. Mt. Sinai

1) Moses receives the law and is gone for 40 days

2) No waiting on God, no patience.

b. Their response

1) When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, "Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." (Exodus 32:1 ESV)

2) Forgetting what God had already done!

3) Circumstances not to their liking and they turn to other gods (syncretism)

c. God's response

1) Ex. 32:35-a plague

2) Not the last punishment either

God takes idolatry seriously!

2. Final Rebellion

a. Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole

congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?" And they said to one another, "Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt." (Numbers 14:1-4 ESV)

- 1) The negative report of the 10 spies sets off the final rebellion of discontented

b. God is not enough

- 1) Forgetting or ignoring that he met their needs and had a purpose for them

- 2) Return to Egypt and slavery

- 3) The picture is of a people that are slaves to their cravings

c. God punishes the discontented one last time

- 1) Wander in circles for 38 more years (no doubt complaining all that time)

- 2) No where to go but the grave

- 3) No land of milk and honey

C. The lesson

1. Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. [7] Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, [10] nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. (1 Corinthians 10:6-11 ESV)

2. The striking resemblance to our own emotions and resulting behavior!

- a. What do I want that I'm not getting?

- b. What am I getting that I do not want?

- c. Result (fruit on the tree)

- 1) Discontentment

- 2) Depression

- 3) Unrighteous anger\bitterness

- 4) Rebellious heart

- 5) Unteachable

- 6) Self-pity
- 7) Complaining
- 8) Argumentative
- 9) Anxiety
- 10) Jealousy/envy
- 11) Coveting
- 12) Stubborn
- 13) Discontentment has many allies

3. Paul's counsel

- a. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. (1 Corinthians 10:12-14 ESV)
- b. Vs 12
 - 1) Discontentment lurks in every person's heart
- c. Vs 13
 - 1) Is discontentment the only option to responding to disappointment \adversity
- d. Vs 14
 - 1) Casting off idols (sinful cravings of the heart)

D. Paul Learned Contentment (Php. 4:10-13)

Questions for CGs.

1. Discontentment is usually revealed by not getting what we want (desires, passions, lusts) or by getting something we do not want (some type of adversity). Chronic discontentment has numerous allies such as anxiety and depression and as we saw from the sermon it leads to idolatry and rebellion. Ask yourself an honest question. To what extent do I reveal a complaining, discontented response to not getting what I want or getting something I do not want? If you are really brave and really want to know ask a trusted friend what they think and accept their feedback without being defensive.
2. As a group read through Psa 77 and work through the following questions.

Discovering the Word

- What words and phrases does the psalmist use to describe his emotion?
- Why does he "groan" at the memory of God (vv. 3-9)?
- How does the tone of the passage change in verses 10-15?
- What is the source of the change?
- How do verses 16-20 emphasize God's power?

Applying the Word

- The psalmist's discontent makes him "too troubled to speak." When have you experienced this?
- Sometimes our culture leads us to believe that material things and achievements, such as a promotion at work, social status, the right relationship, a new car or the perfect house, will bring contentment. What false sources of contentment do you put faith in?
- What in this passage could help you reform your thinking?

Read more: <http://www.ivpress.com/bible/study.php?study=511#ixzz31W2vx000>

3. Respond in prayer from what you learned from Psa.77