

EXCELLENCE IN MINISTRY

Finishing Well—Doing What’s Best in the Challenges of Ministry

Contentment . . . and How to Miss It

1 Timothy 6:6–10, 17–19



LET’S BEGIN HERE

Contentment is a commodity so valuable because it’s so rare. Few doubt it’s the secret to happiness, but most find it elusive. It doesn’t rain down like pennies from heaven. And as we’ll discover in this message, all the pennies in heaven and earth can’t buy it. In fact, money might be the very hindrance to contentment, though it need not be. If a pot of gold is found at the end of a rainbow, contentment is only found there if you bring it with you. And that’s the trick—to possess it, regardless of your possessions. To find contentment, let’s take into account some of Paul’s warnings on how we might *miss* contentment.



LET’S DIG DEEPER

1. Contentment Analyzed

Contentment is often confused with complacency, but these aren’t the same concepts. Complacency is a self-satisfaction that settles for mediocrity. Contentment, for the Christian at least, is Christ-satisfaction that strives for excellence. One congratulates self-sufficiency; the other appreciates God’s sufficiency.

The Meaning of Contentment



Quotable

We miss contentment if something other than food, clothing, and shelter becomes essential to our physical lives.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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GETTING TO THE ROOT

Contentment: Christ-Sufficiency, not Self-Sufficiency

Contentment is a curious word. It comes from the Greek *autarkeia*, and according to Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest, “it speaks of an inward self-sufficiency as opposed to the lack or the desire of outward things.”¹ It was a favorite word of the Stoic philosophers, because it expresses the pinnacle of their philosophy—that man is sufficient in himself for all things and can, by himself, resist the push and pull of outward circumstances. But in the hands of Paul, especially in the context of 1 Timothy 6:6–10, *autarkeia* represents “the possession of a godly piety [that] makes a person independent of outward circumstances . . . enabling him to maintain a spiritual equilibrium in the midst of both favorable circumstances and those which are adverse.”² In other words, contentment in the Christian life is defined by Christ-sufficiency, not self-sufficiency.

The Benefits of Contentment

2. Contentment Amplified (1 Timothy 6:6–10, 17–19)

As we turn to Paul’s instructions on living contented lives, remember that the context centers on false teachers who believed ministry was a means of financial gain (1 Timothy 6:5). Therefore, Paul’s immediate focus in verses 6–10 has to do with people in the ministry. He broadens his consideration in verses 17–19 to include all believers, especially the rich. Out of these two general concerns arise four specific themes: contentment and godliness (6:6), contentment and possessions (6:7–8), contentment and riches (6:9–10, 17), and contentment and character (6:18–19).

Contentment and Godliness



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Contentment and Possessions

Contentment and Riches

Contentment and Character



LET’S LIVE IT

Contentment is the key to happiness. We all agree on that. We just don’t want to go through what we have to go through to get it. We’d prefer to be born with contentment, but we’re not. We have to *learn* it. That’s what Paul said. He “learned to be content in whatever circumstances” (Philippians 4:11), and he “learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need” (4:12). Learning is hard. And many refuse to put forth the effort. So for those who want to continue in their unhappy state, here are three surefire ways to *miss* contentment.

First, *you’ll miss contentment if something other than food, clothing, and shelter becomes essential.*



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Second, you’ll miss contentment if having more money than you currently have consumes your thoughts.

Third, you’ll miss contentment if keeping money rather than releasing money becomes your goal in life.

What is your honest opinion of how much money you earn?

What are some of your hopes and goals for your financial future?

Brainstorm several specific ways you can guard against missing the joy of contentment as you pursue your goals.

ENDNOTES

1. Kenneth S. Wuest, “The Pastoral Epistles in the Greek New Testament,” in *Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 94.
2. Wuest, “The Pastoral Epistles in the Greek New Testament,” in *Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament*, vol. 2, 94.



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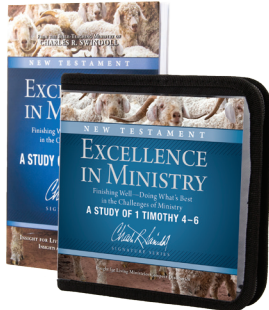
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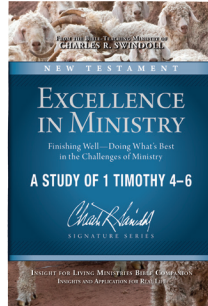
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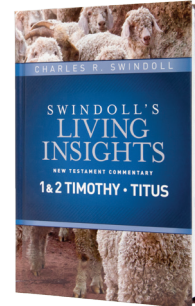
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