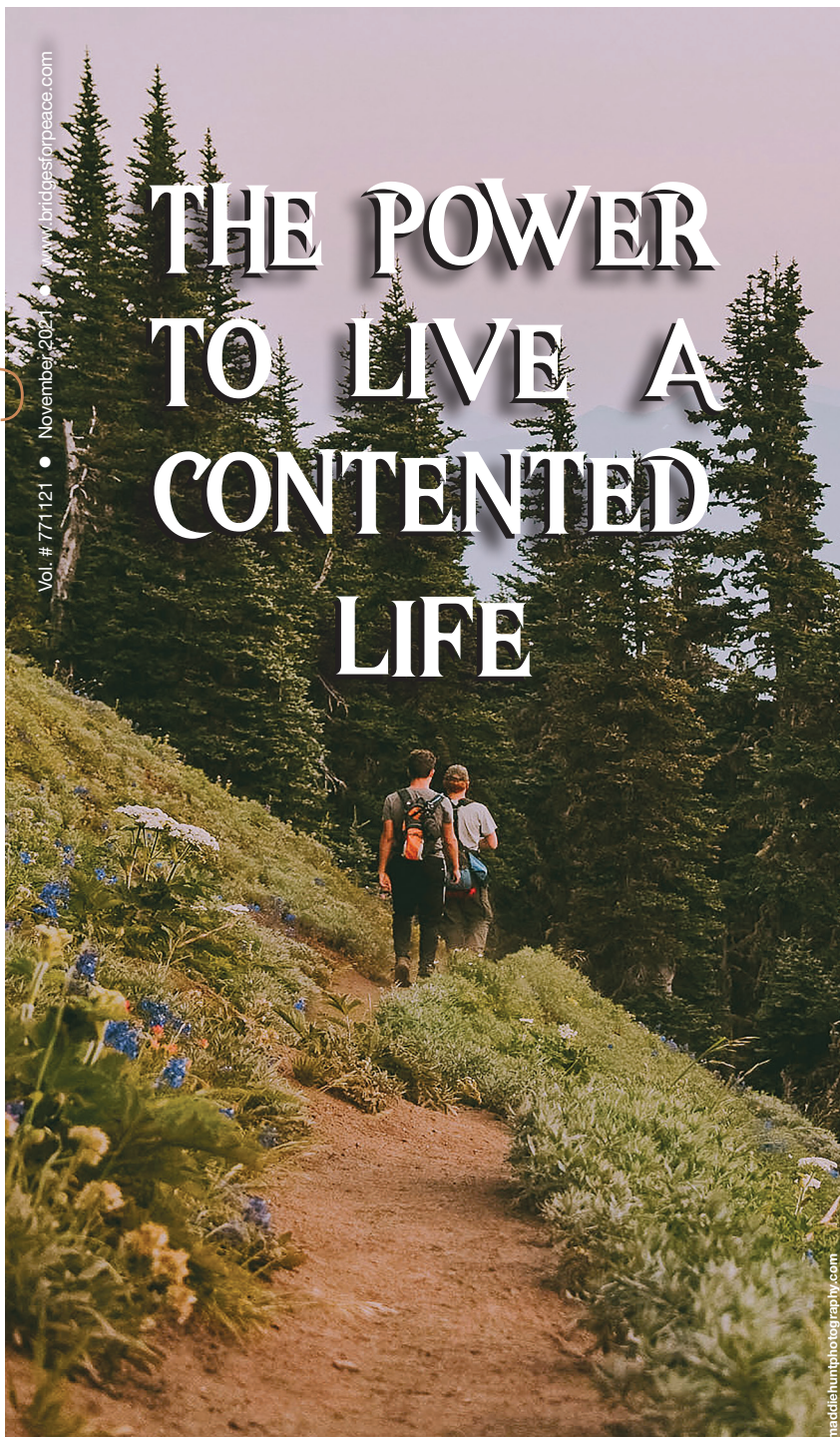


THE POWER TO LIVE A CONTENTED LIFE



AH, CONTENTMENT. A LIFE FREE FROM WORRY, fear, anxiety...those enemies of the godly existence. Nice car, nice house, financial security, perfect spouse, perfect children, perfect church...that's what contentment is all about, right? Wrong—but unfortunately, that definition is accepted by many people today.

And rather than helping us find the path to contentment, placing our hopes in this counterfeit view is a sure recipe for *dis*contentment. Life becomes a constant exercise in comparison, and we never seem to quite measure up. My house isn't big enough, my car new enough, my clothes stylish enough. Fueled by social media, our lives become a race, rushing to acquire the next thing that might bring us happiness. We are bombarded by pictures and propaganda, convincing us we need more, deserve better.

Social media is not the only culprit, however. The Internet, television, games, even billboards are all part of the problem. Today, the average person can encounter a staggering 6,000–10,000 messages *per day* that breed discontent by telling us that our lives are just not right unless we have whatever it is that they are promoting. And in our day of instant information, it seems that society lives in a constant state of discontent.



A CONTENTED LIFE

The Bible tells us that “*godliness with contentment is great gain*” (1 Tim. 6:6). But as we look at the world around us, do we even know what a contented life would look like? And even if we did, is it really an attainable goal? There are dozens of Scripture verses encouraging us toward a contented life and discouraging us from things that cause discontent. It is obviously critical to the life of godliness God wants us to live; a calling on the life of every believer. Furthermore, we can rest assured that whatever God calls us to do, He empowers us to accomplish.

Contentment means to be satisfied with what you have, who you are and where you are. It is respecting the reality of the present while trusting your future in the hands of the God who loves you passionately. The Bible calls us to focus on our convictions, not our circumstances, believing that God's power, purpose and provision are always sufficient. It is learning to walk through adversity resting on God's promises despite what is going on around us.

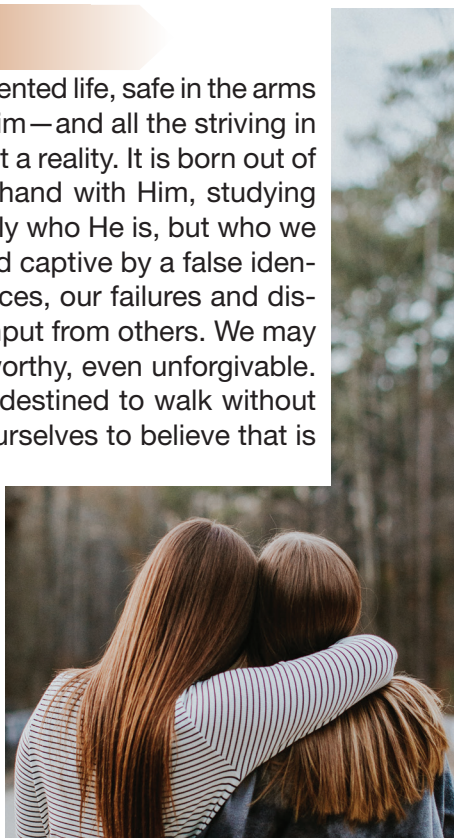
Countless sources tell us contentment can only be found if we “strive” to attain it. Granted, resisting the temptation to fall into discontent requires courage and commitment. Sometimes, we can feel as if we are locked in hand-to-hand combat with a very real enemy who is determined to shipwreck our efforts. However, I believe true contentment is found when we balance the “striving” with three other foundational principles: trusting, resting and gratitude.

TRUSTING



It is impossible to live a contented life, safe in the arms of the Lord, if we don't trust Him—and all the striving in the world won't make that trust a reality. It is born out of relationship, walking hand-in-hand with Him, studying His Word and believing not only who He is, but who we are in Him. Many of us are held captive by a false identity based on our life experiences, our failures and disappointments, and negative input from others. We may believe we are worthless, unworthy, even unforgivable. We feel powerless, defeated, destined to walk without victory. As long as we allow ourselves to believe that is who we are, then that is who we will be. Contentment will remain just beyond our grasp.

But if we believe God is who He says He is—the loving and merciful God for whom nothing is impossible, the God who says He will never leave nor forsake us, who loves us with an everlasting love, who forgives our sins and removes



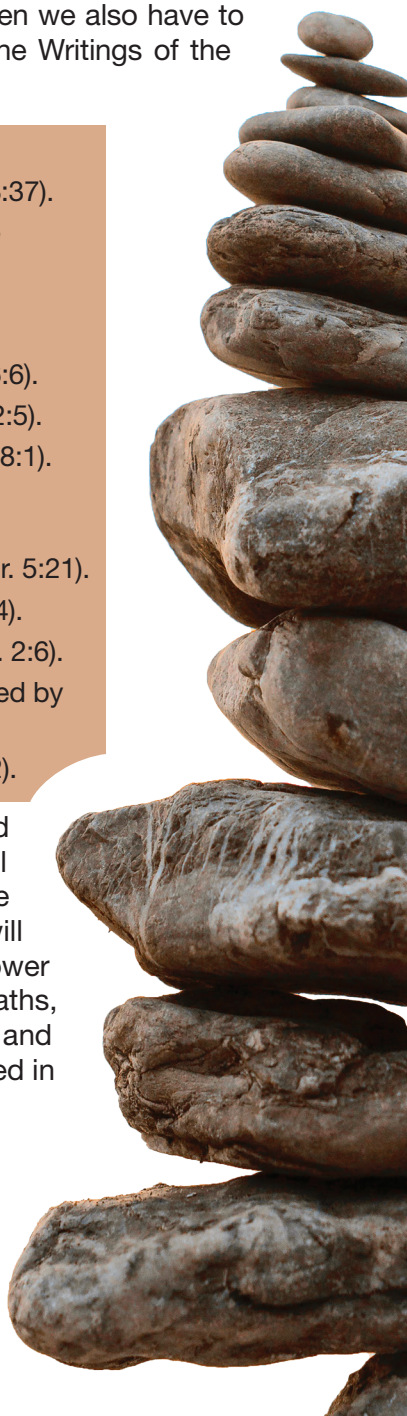
them as far as the east is from the west—then we also have to believe that we are who He says we are. The Writings of the Apostles (NT) tell us this:

1. You are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).
2. You are *more* than a conqueror (Rom. 8:37).
3. You **cannot** be separated from His love (Rom. 8:38–39).
4. You are thoroughly justified before Him (Rom. 8:30).
5. You are dead in Jesus (Yeshua) (Rom. 6:6).
6. You are **alive** in Jesus (Rom. 6:8, Eph. 2:5).
7. You are *free* from condemnation (Rom. 8:1).
8. You are sanctified, holy and set apart (1 Cor. 6:11).
9. You are the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21).
10. You are chosen and blameless (Eph. 1:4).
11. You are seated in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6).
12. You are God’s workmanship, handcrafted by Him for good works (Eph. 2:10).
13. You are a doer of the Word (James 1:22).

He says we are His *sons and daughters*, and in His Word, He makes it pretty clear that all that is **His** is also **ours**. Our every need will be provided, every prayer answered. He will be our shield and our defender. He will empower us to handle whatever comes across our paths, and it is His will for us to walk in the power and authority of the Holy Spirit. Once that’s settled in our hearts, it’s hard to be discontent.

RESTING

We live in a crazy world where the busier we are, the more we are admired by our peers. Resting isn’t even really in our vocabulary. We are strong, we are independent and being “crazy busy” is a badge of honor! But it is the opposite of the life God



desires us to have. *“Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him”* (Ps. 37:7a).

Not only is our constant rushing from one thing to the next and never stopping to take a breath unhealthy for our bodies, it also leaves us spiritually weak. Living such a life keeps us focused on our circumstances and opens the door for the enemy to tempt us with discontent. But the Lord says He wants us to rest in perfect peace, in that quiet calm that He gives to those who trust, love and obey Him regardless of their circumstances.

Trusting Him also means believing in His sovereignty, understanding that ultimately, He is in control. Our lives are His, we belong to Him, and we can believe that He always has our best interests at heart, even when our circumstances would have us believe otherwise. *“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose”* (Rom. 8:28).

The Greek phrase *“called according to His purpose”* might also be translated *“divinely selected to be set forth for public view.”* Once we become believers, we have answered God’s invitation to be put on display, to love Him and live in such a way that we constantly reveal to those around us who God is and the glory and wonder of being in relationship with Him.

But in our harried 21st-century lives, there is another word missing from our vocabulary: surrender. We have been conditioned to strive for independence, solve our own problems, and take care of ourselves and those around us. In contrast, God says we are to lean on Him, cease our striving and rest *completely dependent* on Him. The world would have us believe that we must be strong, but the apostle Paul tells us that he was strongest when he was at his weakest (2 Cor. 12:10). When we release our burdens and joyfully surrender our will to His, we can truly be “at rest.” And as we spend time with Him, enjoying Him and immersing ourselves in His Word, we realize that what the world offers is distraction and temptation. But God offers Himself...

and with Him comes rest and contentment. Seventeenth-century Puritan author Jeremiah Burroughs wrote, “Contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely *surrenders* to and delights in God’s wise and fatherly disposal [authority] in every condition.” See also Exodus 33:14.

GRATITUDE

Gratitude is defined as the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for kindness. As those who trust in the faithfulness of God and rest in the knowledge of His loving sovereignty, our reactions can set us apart from those who live without such hope. Thinking thankful thoughts actually increases the production of dopamine in our brains, flooding us with pleasant feelings. The more dopamine our brains produce, the more they want. So being grateful is sort of a self-perpetuating state. Living a contented life is impossible without it. Experts also tell us we’ll experience some health benefits as well. Those who have cultivated gratitude experience stronger immune systems, less joint pain, lower blood pressure, better sleep, more compassion and less loneliness. This may be news to us, but the psalmist understood it over 2,000 years ago (see Psalm 103:2–5).

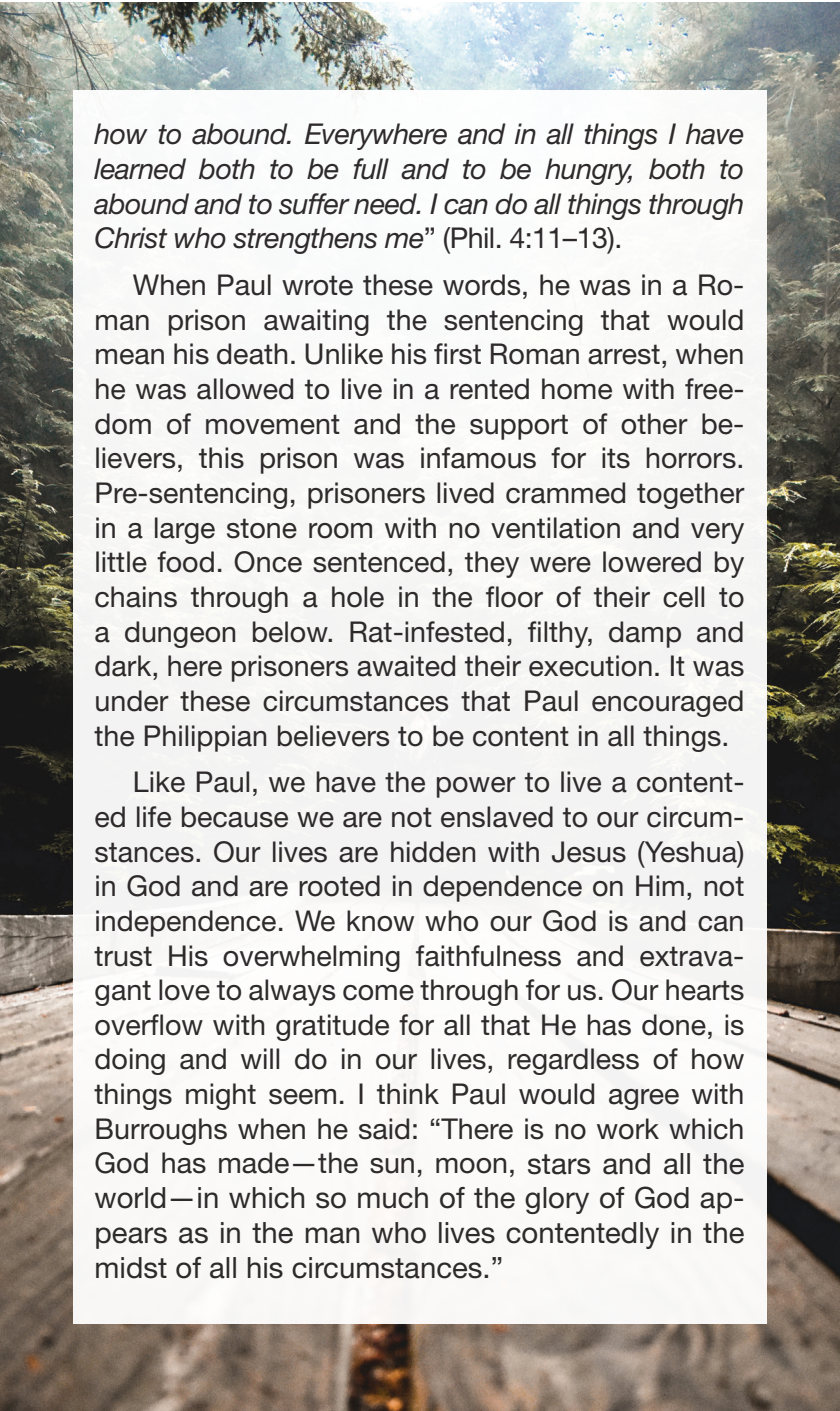
Gratitude is like a suit of armor that protects us from the temptation to be discontent. If we fill our minds with thoughts of the greatness of God in all that He is and has done for us—even the growth that we experience during difficult times—there is no room left for the negative trap that the enemy has set.

A LESSON FROM PAUL



Many references to contentment are found in the writings of Paul. Even though he had lived an extremely difficult life—beaten, scourged, imprisoned and shipwrecked—no one was a more articulate proponent of the importance of contentment.

“Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know



how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:11–13).

When Paul wrote these words, he was in a Roman prison awaiting the sentencing that would mean his death. Unlike his first Roman arrest, when he was allowed to live in a rented home with freedom of movement and the support of other believers, this prison was infamous for its horrors. Pre-sentencing, prisoners lived crammed together in a large stone room with no ventilation and very little food. Once sentenced, they were lowered by chains through a hole in the floor of their cell to a dungeon below. Rat-infested, filthy, damp and dark, here prisoners awaited their execution. It was under these circumstances that Paul encouraged the Philippian believers to be content in all things.

Like Paul, we have the power to live a contented life because we are not enslaved to our circumstances. Our lives are hidden with Jesus (Yeshua) in God and are rooted in dependence on Him, not independence. We know who our God is and can trust His overwhelming faithfulness and extravagant love to always come through for us. Our hearts overflow with gratitude for all that He has done, is doing and will do in our lives, regardless of how things might seem. I think Paul would agree with Burroughs when he said: “There is no work which God has made—the sun, moon, stars and all the world—in which so much of the glory of God appears as in the man who lives contentedly in the midst of all his circumstances.”

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Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God's chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT) – *Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or NT)
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

Bridges for Peace—Offices

Australia: Tel: 07-5479-4229, bfp.au@bridgesforpeace.com

Canada: Tel: 204-489-3697, Toll free: 855-489-3697, info@bfpcan.org

Japan: Tel: (81) 3-5969-9656, bfp@bfjp.org

New Zealand: Tel: (64) 7-855-5262, emather.nz@bridgesforpeace.com

South Africa: Tel: 021-975-1941, info@bridgesforpeace.co.za

South Korea: Tel: 070-8772-2014, bfp@bfpkorea.com

Spanish: Tel: (52) 646-238-7206, intl.spanish@bridgesforpeace.com

Russia: Tel: (7) 903-309-1849, info.ru@bridgesforpeace.com

United Kingdom: Tel: 165-673-9494, ukoffice@bridgesforpeace.com

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International Headquarters

PO Box 1093, Jerusalem, Israel

Tel: (972) 2-624-5004

intl.office@bridgesforpeace.com

www.bridgesforpeace.com

