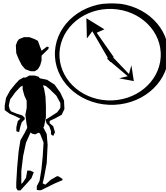


Inside this issue:

<i>A Case Study in Contentment</i>	1
<i>A.M. Sermon Outline:</i>	6
Bible Classes	
Duty Rosters	7
Announcements & For the Record	8



Time of Assembly



Every other Sunday:

Bible Study	9:00 a.m.
Worship	10:00 a.m.

OR

Bible Study	4:00 p.m.
Worship	5:00 p.m.

Wednesday:

Bible Study	7:00 p. m.
-------------	------------

A Case Study in Contentment

By Jefferson David Tant

“Contentment” is a word that may not well describe many people. There are many causes of discontent in this 21st Century — family discord, health issues, job stress, financial concerns, government corruption, joblessness, worries about the threat of Islamic terrorism, and sometimes church problems. These are struggles that most all of us have to deal with from time to time.

And yet our “Owner’s Manual” teaches us to learn to be content. One on occasion “*Some soldiers were questioning him (John) saying, ‘And what about us, what shall we do?’ And he said to them, ‘Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages’*” ([Luke 3:14](#)).

I suppose if anyone is qualified to teach about contentment, it would be the apostle Paul. In his letter to the Corinthians, he chides those who present their “credentials.” He asks if they can match his: “*Are they servants of Christ? -- I speak as if insane -- I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches*” ([II Corinthians 11:23-28](#)).

What does Paul think about all of this? Would he have the right to be discouraged, to complain, to think about giving up, to wonder where God was? Obviously, from a human viewpoint, we could easily understand such thoughts. But we turn to Paul’s letter to Philippi. At this writing, he is in prison, and rejoicing that his situation is even causing the gospel to be spread ([Philippians 1:12-18](#)). Very likely, Paul was in the Mamertine Prison in Rome. It was not a pleasant place. I have been there and descended into the dungeon two levels below street level to see a cell hewn out of rock — dark and damp.

While there, Paul shared something with his beloved brethren that makes us wonder. He thanks the brethren for sending to his assistance: *“But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me”* ([Philippians 4:10-13](#)).

How could Paul have such an attitude? Because he was not alone. There was someone with him — his Lord Jesus Christ. On one occasion when he was on trial, he stood alone, except for his faithful friend. *“At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me”* ([II Timothy 4:16-17](#)). In [I Timothy 6](#), Paul wrote about certain evil men *“who suppose that godliness is a means of gain”* ([I Timothy 6:5](#)), and then goes on to counteract that false notion by stating in [I Timothy 6:6-8](#), *“But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. 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.”*

Some might be thinking, “Well, Paul was an apostle. He had divine revelation. He was not an ordinary human like we are. We can’t be as strong as he was.” If that is your thought, please allow me to share with you the following story about Mabel, a human being just like you and me. Well, maybe not exactly as we are. The story is told by her friend, Tom Schmidt.

“The state-run convalescent home is not a pleasant place. It is large, understaffed, and overfilled with senile and helpless and lonely people who are waiting to die. On the brightest days it seems dark inside, and it smells of sickness and stale urine. I went there once or twice a week for four years, but I never wanted to go there, and I always left with a sense of relief. It is not the kind of place one gets used to.

“On this particular day I was walking in a hallway that I had not visited before, looking in vain for a few who were alive to receive a flower and a few words of encouragement. This hallway seemed to contain some of the worst cases, strapped onto carts or into wheelchairs and looking completely helpless.

“As I neared the end of this hallway, I saw an old woman strapped in a wheelchair. Her face was an absolute horror. The empty stare and white pupils of her eyes told me that she was blind. The large hearing aid over one ear told me that she was almost deaf. One side of her face was being eaten by cancer. There was a discolored and running sore covering part of one cheek, and it has pushed her nose to one side, dropped one eye, and distorted her jaw so that what should have been the corner of her mouth was the bottom of her mouth. As a consequence, she drooled constantly. I was told later than when new nurses arrived, the supervisors would send them to feed this woman, thinking that if they could stand this sight they could stand anything in the building. I also learned later that his woman was eighty-nine years old and that she had been here, bedridden, blind, nearly deaf, and alone, for twenty-five years. This was Mabel.

“I don’t know why I spoke to her — she looked less likely to respond than most of the people I saw in that hallway. But I put a flower in her hand and said, ‘Here is a flower for you. Happy Mother’s Day.’ She held the flower up to her face and tried to smell it, and then she spoke. And much to my surprise, her words, although somewhat garbled because of her deformity, were obvi-

ously produced by a clear mind. She said, 'Thank you. It's lovely. But can I give it to someone else? I can't see it, you know. I'm blind.'

"I said, 'Of course,' and I pushed her in her chair back down the hallway to a place where I thought I could find some alert patients. I found one, and I stopped the chair. Mabel held out the flower and said, 'Here, this is from Jesus.'

"That was when it began to dawn on me that this was not an ordinary human being. Later I wheeled her back to her room and learned more about her history. She had grown up on a small farm that she managed with only her mother until her mother died. Then she ran the farm alone until 1950 when her blindness and sickness sent her to the convalescent hospital. For twenty-five years she got weaker and sicker, with constant headaches, backaches, and stomachaches, and then the cancer came too. Her three roommates were all human vegetables who screamed occasionally but never talked. They often soiled their bedclothes, and because the hospital was understaffed, especially on Sundays when I usually visited, the stench was often overpowering.

"Mabel and I became friends over the next few weeks, and I went to see her once or twice a week for the next three years. Her first words to me were usually an offer of hard candy from a tissue box near her bed. Some days I would read to her from the Bible, and often when I would pause she would continue reciting the passage from memory, word-for-word. On other days I would take a book of hymns and sing with her, and she would know all the words of the old songs. For Mabel, these were not merely exercises in memory. She would often stop in mid-hymn and make a brief comment about lyrics she considered particularly relevant to her own situation. I never heard her speak of loneliness or pain except in the stress she faced on certain lines in certain hymns.

"It was not many weeks before I turned from a sense that I was being helpful to a sense of wonder, and I would go to her with a pen and paper to write down the things she would say ...

"During one hectic week of final exams I was frustrated because my mind seemed to be pulled in ten directions at once with all of the things that I had to think about. The question occurred to me, 'What does Mabel have to think about — hour after hour day after day, week after week, nor even able to know if it's day or night?' So I went to her and asked, 'Mabel, what do you think about when you lie here?'

"And she said, 'I think about my Jesus.'

"I sat there, and thought for a moment about the difficulty, for me, of thinking about Jesus for even five minutes, and I asked, 'What do you think about Jesus?' She replied slowly and deliberately as I wrote ... I think about how good he's been to me. He's been awfully good to me in my life, you know ... I'm one of those who are mostly satisfied ... Lots of folks wouldn't care much for what I think. Lots of folks would think I'm kind of old-fashioned. But I don't care. I'd rather have Jesus. He's all the world to me.

"And then Mabel began to sing an old hymn:

Jesus is all the world to me,
My life, my joy, my all.
He is my strength from day to day,
Without him I would fall.
When I am sad, to him I go,
No other one can cheer me so.
When I am sad he makes me glad.

He's my friend.

"This is not fiction. Incredible as it may seem, a human being really lived like this. I know. I knew her. How could she do it? Seconds ticked and minutes crawled, and so did days and weeks and months and years of pain without human company and without an explanation of why it was all happening — and she lay there and sang hymns. How could she do it?"

"The answer, I think, is that Mabel had something that you and I don't have much of. She had power. Lying there in that bed, unable to move, unable to see, unable to hear, unable to talk to anyone, she had incredible power." (Tom Schmidt)

What was the source of Mabel's power? Perhaps Paul can give us the answer. *"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me"* ([Philippians 4:13](#)).

As exceptional as Mabel is, she is not alone in her remarkable attitude. Let me tell you about Sandra Green. One summer when I was driving our van picking up children for VBS in Montego Bay, Jamaica, I gave a ride to a woman and six children walking beside the road. Sandra's husband had long since left her with five children. Then a friend died leaving a 12-year-old girl whose father did not want her. Sandra took her in. After Sandra started bringing the children to our VBS, I asked if my wife and I might visit with her. She directed us to the place where she lived. Poverty is rampant in Jamaica. It is truly a third-world nation. I had seen poverty but was not prepared for the sight before us as we climbed the hill to her home. It was a shed made of scrap lumber, zinc, boards, and what-have-you. It may have been 8 x 10, with no furniture except for two beds, if you would call them that. She cooked outside in a lean-to on a two-burner kerosene stove. She had no utilities — no running water, no electricity.

When Sandra opened the door to invite us in, the first thing I saw was a poster she had made and put on the wall. It read, "Thank you, Lord. My needs are met, and healing is mine. Hallelujah! Thank you, Jesus." I wept, as the tears coursed down my cheeks. This poor woman had virtually nothing, but she was content.

Ruth Pascual is the daughter of a faithful preacher in the Philippines. When I stayed in the Pascual's home, I saw a five-room home with electricity and water from a pump outback. There was no back door, so a board was put up at night to keep the animals out. My bed was made of bamboo strips with only a sheet for padding.

When talking with Ruth one day, I asked how many dresses she had. "Four." Then I said, "If you could have anything in the world, what would it be?" She thought a moment and then replied, "I need nothing, Uncle David. I am content." I persisted that there must be something she would like to have. "Well, maybe a Jeep for my father." Rogelio preached for two churches several miles apart. He had already had two accidents on his motorcycle on the muddy roads, so a Jeep would help him do his work better. That's all she could think of. When I got home and told the other elders, she got her wish — a Jeep for her father.

Now, what was your problem? What was it you were complaining about? We, who are so blessed, so often are not content. We want more of this, more of that. Bigger this, bigger that. Newer this, newer that. Latest fashions, bigger closets. And on it goes with our want list.

And what do we do with our abundance? Spend it on ever more things for ourselves? Do we ever make sacrifices for the Lord and his work? I am reminded of the brethren in Macedonia whom Paul commended as he was writing to Corinth. *"Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of*

affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God” ([II Corinthians 8:1-5](#)).

Consider what Paul said about them.

1. They had affliction and deep poverty;
2. they had an abundance of joy;
3. there was an overflowing in the wealth of their liberality;
4. they gave beyond their ability;
5. they gave willingly, not from coercion;
6. they had to beg Paul to receive their benevolence, as he knew they could not afford to give as they did; and
7. this was made possible because “first they gave themselves to the Lord.”

What a spirit. What a testimony. Furthermore, we note that the church in Philippi (which was in Macedonia) was the only church that, at some point in time, had supported Paul. “*You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs*” ([Philippians 4:15-16](#)).

Let us learn something from the examples of these three good women, Mabel, Sandra, and Ruth, as well as those given by inspiration — the Macedonians and Paul. Let us learn:

1. to be content, and not always looking for bigger and better, and
2. to be willing to give to the Lord’s work, yea, even to make sacrifices that the Kingdom of God may be spread and his name glorified.

“*Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,' so that we confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?'*” ([Hebrews 13:5-6](#)).

Question: Have you ever made a real sacrifice? I mean really given up something that cost you dearly? Maybe in giving to help further the gospel in some way? Consider Paul’s willingness to sacrifice himself. “*But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all*” ([Philippians 2:17](#)). And what word did he use to describe what they had done for him? “*But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God*” ([Philippians 4:18](#)). Or maybe making a sacrifice to help someone in a desperate situation? Have you ever given up a vacation, or neglected to buy something you wanted, because you saw a greater need?

There is another sacrifice that we must make — and that is ourselves. “*Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship*” ([Romans 12:1](#)). Dear reader, if you have not made this sacrifice, then the sacrifice Christ made through his crucifixion is of no value to you. “*And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself*” ([John 12:32](#)). If you have not sacrificed yourself in obedience to God, please do not delay.