



CONTENTMENT

LESSON 4
CONTENTMENT KILLERS

HeartLine
CROSSLINE COMMUNITY CHURCH





Get Healthy Contentment

Lesson Four: Contentment Killers

Looking Back: 10 Minutes

1. Last week we studied Philippians 4:8 and discussed eight things we are to think about. Which attribute of healthy thinking did you focus on during the past week?
2. How often do you/did you “think about what you think about?” How did “thinking about what you think about” affect your level of contentment?
3. During the past week, were there moments you needed to stop one pattern of thinking and replace it with a healthier pattern of thinking? Discuss.
4. Did you find yourself circling around any issue this week? If so, did you stop and square off around the issue? Discuss anything you learned, or any questions you have about stopping the cycle of spiral.
5. Did you make any changes to what you watch, read or see this week? If so, how did your changes affect your level of contentment?

Looking Forward: 50 Minutes

If you’ve seen our family, you know my daughter Kylie is a carbon copy of me. One day not long ago, I was browsing through some old photos when I stumbled on a picture of Kylie. I stared at the picture for a moment. I couldn’t quite pinpoint when I had taken it. I didn’t recognize her outfit or the background. And suddenly, the light bulb went off: I was staring at a picture of me!

Looking at stories of people in the Bible can be much like me looking at a picture of my daughter. By looking at their faces, we see our own. We may not recognize their outfit or their background, but something about their experience, their reaction, or their motivation makes us sit up, take notice, and exclaim, “Oh my goodness, that’s *me!*”

This week we’re going to look at four examples of discontented people found in the Bible. As you read their stories, take note of what made them discontent; what I call

“Contentment Killers”. Also note how their discontentment caused them to react. See if any part of their story identifies with your own.

1. Example One: Sarai and Unfulfilled Expectations

Read Genesis 16:1-6 and answer the following questions.

- a. **Why was Sarai discontent (v. 2 and 4)? (Note: if this scenario seems odd to you, congratulations! You are normal. It may help to think of this situation as ancient day surrogacy.)**

- b. **It’s easy to pinpoint the presenting issues surrounding discontentment, but every presenting issue is birthed by an underlying issue--the *real* issue. Sarah’s real issue was unfulfilled expectations. What expectations do you think contributed to Sarai’s discontentment?**

- c. **Do unfulfilled expectations affect your contentment? If so, how?**

I realize it might be hard to verbalize your unfulfilled expectations, especially to a group. If this makes you uncomfortable, please don’t feel pressured to share. But I do want you to acknowledge your expectations to yourself. Think of it like this: how can you figure out how to get healthy if you misdiagnose what’s making you miserable? What we *think* is making us discontent, might very well be just a scratch on the surface. In an earlier lesson we discussed how disappointment can lead to discontentment. Well, disappointment stems from unrealized expectations.

When you are mindful of your expectations, you can manage your expectations in a healthy way.

Now back to Sarai...

- d. **How did she handle her discontentment with her husband? With Hagar?**

- e. **When you feel discontented do you ever blame others for your discontentment? Do you ever lash out in anger? Discuss.**

Blame and anger are two primary ways women handle discontentment in unhealthy ways. It's our way of saying, "the discontentment I feel is your fault!" Anger and blame places the responsibility of our discontentment on someone else, which puts the responsibility of our contentment on them, as well.

In other words, we relinquish the control of our contentment into the hands of another. Which is profoundly unhealthy.

- f. We have a counselor friend who addresses unhealthy ways of coping by asking, "So, how's that working for you?" What do you think: How did the blame and anger thing work for Sarai? Does it work well for you? Why or why not?**

2. Example Two: Hagar and Relational Disharmony

Read Genesis 16:4-10; 13 and answer the following questions.

- ❖ *Please note: this story is not about abuse, but about two women whose discontentment with their circumstances led to unhealthy ways of relating to each other. There is a story of relational disharmony, driven by jealousy, pride and comparison.*
- a. Why was Hagar discontent?**
- b. Can you see ways jealousy, pride and comparison might have contributed to the problem between Sarai and Hagar? How?**
- c. How did Hagar handle her discontentment?**
- d. Do you ever run away from relational situations that make you discontent (either literally, or by emotionally withdrawing or disengaging)?**
- e. According to Genesis 16:13, what did Hagar realize about God? How do you think this helped her face the circumstance and the person that contributed to her discontentment?**

- f. **While there are times it's best to physically remove ourselves from unhealthy situations or relationships, that's not always the best solution. What did the angel of the Lord tell Hagar to do in this case?**
- g. **It's important to note that Hagar's behavior was part of the problem here. With this in mind, why do you think facing the situation, rather than running away from the situation, was the healthiest choice?**

Women run away from discontentment in any number of unhealthy ways: through alcohol, shopping, eating, reading, drugs, moving from relationship to relationship, busyness, social media, pouting, the silent treatment, and the ultimate withdrawal—suicide—just to name a few. None of these ways of handling discontentment makes someone more content. If you happen to see yourself in Hagar's story, please know that God can help you face what's hurting you. He really, truly, can. He is the God who sees *you*.

But, like Hagar, you must make a decision to process the pain in a healthy way.

3. Example Three: The Israelites (after they were delivered from slavery) and Dissatisfaction

Read Numbers 21:4-5, written below, and answer the following questions.

Then the people of Israel set out from Mount Hor, taking the road to the Red Sea—to go around the land of Edom. But the people grew impatient with the long journey, ⁵ and they began to speak against God and Moses. "Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die here in the wilderness?" they complained. "There is nothing to eat here and nothing to drink. And we hate this horrible manna!" (Numbers 21:4-5 NLT)

- a. **Why were the people discontented?**
- b. **Dissatisfaction can easily lead to discontentment. How did they handle their discontentment (v. 5)?**
- c. **Do you ever complain when you feel dissatisfied and discontent?**
- d. **Time to be honest: Does complaining increase your sense of contentment or lessen it? (Or, in the words of our friend: "So, how's that working for you?")**

- e. **Look up Philippians 2:14 and note what God says about complaining. Write it out below.**

- f. **Is there any area where you are complaining when you should be changing? If yes, how will you stop complaining and get to work changing?**

Let me be blunt: Complaining is the lazy woman's solution to discontentment. Why? Because when we complain we refuse to deal with our dissatisfaction with action.

Yeah, I know. Ouch.

4. Example Four: Martha and Self-Pity

Read Luke 10:38-42 and answer the following questions.

- a. **Why was Martha discontent?**

- b. **How did she handle her discontentment?**

- c. **Self Pity fuels feeling of discontentment. How do you see evidence of self-pity in Martha's actions and attitudes?**

- d. **What adjectives does Jesus use to describe her state of mind? Do these adjectives sound more like a content person, or a discontent person?**

- e. **Based on how Jesus responded to her demand, do you think she handled her discontentment in a healthy way? Why or why not?**

Discontentment turned outward makes us critical and controlling ("Tell her to help me!"). Discontentment turned inward makes us discouraged and depressed ("Lord, don't you care?").

Martha felt discontented with her situation, with her sister, and with her Savior. Sweet Martha (who wasn't all that sweet in the moment) experienced the trifecta of discontentment:

I don't like what I'm doing.

I don't like what you're doing.

I don't like what God's doing.

I'm guessing there's not a woman alive who hasn't seen a little bit of herself in Martha's story.

- f. When you feel discontent, are you more likely to become critical and controlling, or discouraged and depressed?**

- g. Martha's discontentment was rooted in having priorities that didn't make sense. When our priorities are out of whack, so are we. Do you ever feel discontented as a result of feeling the "need" to do things that aren't truly essential for you to do?**

- h. How do you think having your priorities in order would affect (like, *really* affect) your sense of contentment?**

- i. Is there any shift you need to make in your priorities so you can experience more contentment? If yes, what specific change do you need to make? Write it here: _____**

Life Application

This week we've examined four primary contentment killers:

1. Unfulfilled Expectations
2. Relational Disharmony
3. Dissatisfaction
4. Self-Pity and Wrong Priorities

1. Identify your primary contentment killer. Write it here:

We also uncovered four unhealthy ways people deal with discontentment:

1. Anger and Blame
 2. Avoidance (Running Away)
 3. Complaining
 4. Criticism, Control, Discouragement, Depression
- 2. Identify any unhealthy ways you currently deal with your discontentment. Write it down here:**
- 3. *When we become aware of our contentment killers, and we become aware of the unhealthy ways we deal with our discontentment, we can take steps to respond in healthier ways—ways that will actually help us move from a place of discontentment to contentment. In her message, Donna discussed healthy ways to handle personal discontentment. What will you do to handle discontentment in a healthy way, this week? Write it down here:***
- 4. Prayer is one of the most powerful tools to help us live contented in the midst of less-than-perfect circumstances (or maybe *especially* in the midst of them!) Please don't take this for granted. Prayer is your way to talk to God, and God's way to talk to you. To keep your mind and heart focused as you pray, write your prayer below. Ask God for his help, and thank God for his help, too!**

Optional: Further Reading, Reflection and Bible Study

- 1. Read Ephesians 4: 17-32.** Make a list of the commands. Ask God to help you obey them, so you can step into the full experience of relational contentment.