

# “I Have Learned To Be Content”

**Introduction.** Kids who can wait for something do better in school. That’s what Walter Mischel, professor of psychology at Columbia University, proved in an experiment in 1970 with four-year-olds. He would leave one child in a room with a bell and a marshmallow. If the child rang the bell, Mischel would come back and the child could eat the marshmallow. If the child waited for Mischel to come back on his own, the child could have two marshmallows.

In videos of the experiment, you can see children squirming, kicking, hiding their eyes — desperately trying to exercise self-control so they could wait and get two marshmallows. Their performance varied widely. Some broke down and rang the bell within a minute. Others lasted fifteen minutes.

The children who waited longer went on to get higher SAT scores. They got into better colleges and, on average, achieved more as adults. The children who rang the bell quickest were more likely to become bullies. They received worse teacher and parental evaluations ten years later and were more likely to have drug problems by age thirty-two. Mischel concluded that children may be taught “that it pays to work toward the future instead of living for instant gratification.”

Given these kinds of results, we need reminders that we can find contentment and peace of mind if we accept God’s prescription for it, not the world’s (Proverbs 30:7-9). And contentment, and therefore this lesson, can touch every area of your life: finances, health, marriage, and career. So listen and carefully contemplate what can help you immensely in your life.

## ***I. The Definition Of Contentment***

- A. Contentment means “to be sufficient, to be possessed of sufficient strength, to be strong or satisfied; adequate, needing no assistance” (W. E. Vine).
- B. This was originally a Stoic word which expressed one of the favorite doctrines of the group, that man should be sufficient in himself for everything. He should be able, by the power of his own will, to resist the shock of circumstance. Paul used the word and he was self-sufficient, but not through his own power.

## ***II. Contentment And Circumstances***

- A. Contentment is a “learned” life (Philippians 4:10-14).
  - 1. It is learned by use and practice. Paul had experience and time to reflect on this valuable lesson (1 Corinthians 4:11; 2 Corinthians 6:10; 11:26-27).
  - 2. Paul learned contentment, not at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), but at the feet of Christ (Matthew 8:20; Luke 9:58).
- B. How Paul could learn contentment?
  - 1. He knew suffering was temporary.
    - a) This is perhaps the greatest key to balancing the struggle between suffering and contentment.
    - b) One day his suffering would end, and he would be with God after the judgment (Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 5:7-9). We are Christians, and we have the hope of heaven where there will be no more pain and sorrow (Revelation 21:4).

2. He was involved in a work greater than himself.
  - a) Paul accepted the fact that hardship was part of the deal when he was made an apostle of Christ. It seems as if he never even questioned the possibility that it would be any different (Acts 9:16; Ephesians 3:13; Colossians 1:24; 2 Timothy 2:8-9).
  - b) All you people in the audience whose thoughts and emotions are all over the place would be happier people if you would put the work of the Lord and your brethren above yourself. You would be happier and more content if you would spend less time thinking about yourself and more about what you could do for the cause of Jesus and for your brethren in Christ (2 Corinthians 12:15).
3. He knew he could trust God no matter what happened.
  - a) Paul wrote Philippians as a prisoner and some trusted in the Lord because of his imprisonment (Philippians 1:12-14). No matter why the gospel was preached, it would turn out to his deliverance (Philippians 1:15-19).
  - b) Furthermore, as Paul battled his “thorn in the flesh,” he could trust in God’s grace (2 Corinthians 12:9).
    - (1) We have food, clothing, and shelter, but we have debts and expenses beyond our ability to quickly resolve — His grace is sufficient.
    - (2) We have disease, have lost our job, and cannot see how to survive until tomorrow — His grace is sufficient.
4. He counted everything except Christ as nothing.
  - a) Because of all that Christ had become to him, Paul was willing to collect all his former privileges, to put them, as it were, in one box, and write that off as loss (Philippians 3:5-9).
  - b) Furthermore, he was not content simply to dismiss them and become indifferent to them. Rather, he rejected them with horror (they were like dung or refuse) and treated them as liabilities.
5. He looked forward to heaven more than he looked forward to this life.
  - a) We are so focused on life and how much we can squeeze out of every day, week, month, and year, that we actually forget what our purpose here is: to serve God and keep His commandments (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). All of the degrees we can achieve, all of the money we can make, all of the children we can have, and all the vacations we can take do not constitute a successful and full life if we fail to go to heaven (Philippians 1:23-24; 2 Timothy 4:6-8).
  - b) Our reward is not to be found in this life, nor was it ever intended to be. This life is meant to be lived by us in full recognition of our duty to God. Nothing we achieve in this life should ever come close to overshadowing that obligation (Philippians 3:20; cp. Luke 12:18-21).

### **III. Areas Of Discontent**

- A. After hearing and seeing all this about contentment, we are going to close with some areas where I do not want to be content or satisfied.
  1. My spiritual growth (Colossians 1:10; 2 Peter 1:5-8).

2. My love for God and others (Philippians 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 3:12).
  3. My thanksgiving (Colossians 2:7; Ephesians 5:20).
  4. My giving and benevolence (2 Corinthians 8:2, 7)
  5. My teaching in the kingdom (John 4:35; Acts 8:4-8).
- B. As you have seen, the theme of abounding has run through these suggestions. “Abound” means “to exist in a large quantity; overflowing,” and I need to abound in the work of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58).

**Conclusion.** A contented mind is a continual feast because it removes anxiety (Philippians 4:6-7). Someone said, “The nice thing about the future is that it comes only one day at a time.” Trust in God, do His will, and have the peace that passes all understanding. Most of all, come to Christ today and be at peace with Him spiritually (Romans 5:1-2; Ephesians 2:12).