

More or Less

Part 1 – Where I Am vs Where I Want to Be

Intro

It was the turn of the century, Y2K was upon us, and the world was on edge. Would we, or won't we? Will the world end at the stroke of midnight on January 1, 2000? Would chaos reign in the streets if personal computers, street lights, and power grids failed at the hands of mixed up 1's and 0's?

Melissa and I had just traveled halfway across the country – from TN to TX. One the eve of Y2K and in the middle of an ice storm. Every belonging we had was piled into 2 cars and a moving van. We had been married about 2.5 years, long enough to get settled into a new life together. But when we arrived at the house we were renting, like kind of halted.

It was a tiny shack that could not hold all of the stuff and dreams from our short married life. We had to turn sideways to get into bed, because our queen-sized bed was almost touching – wall to wall. Our small kitchen table didn't fit so we had to eat from a small square card table. The couch didn't fit in the living. The curtains hang a foot from the bottom of the wall. And, to top it all off, we're pretty sure the neighbor next door had a shack in the back that was cooking something up.

It was a moment when our desires were crushed by reality. And we all face these moments. Usually not just once, but several times throughout the course of our lives. Some people are able to handle these difficult times of life with such grace and peace that it baffles the rest of us.

The word for this peaceful response is *contentment*.

How do you find contentment when where you are is not where you want to be?

Over the course of the next month, we will [as a family] address the [what seems like] mirage of contentment. We will look at past, present, and future hopes and how this idea of contentment guides our emotions and lives when reality crashes the party of expectation.

Contentment – Deciding to be satisfied with where you are and what you have.

All of us experience disappointment. Things don't turn out like we had planned them in our minds. The raise never comes through. The job you are doing is just that – a job. As a young 20-something you had high hopes of changing the world. The relationship you dreamed you would have with your spouse [or non-existent spouse] isn't what you had written down in your teenage journal.

Disappointment is simply a reality of life. How we deal with and process these disappointments is what changes our perspective and defines the overall quality of our lives. But it doesn't come naturally.

Philippians 4:11-12

Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

Paul started out with the picture-perfect life. He was a rising young star in the Jewish religious system, which also held certain political sway in their day. He was well-to-do, highly respected, and a high-ranking Pharisee. He had a trajectory that only pointed up.

But then something happened. He met Jesus. And Jesus ruined Paul's life...at least from an outward appearance. No longer the poster boy for *the way things have always been*, Paul was forced to go on the run and leave town. He had become an enemy of state. His former Pharisee good-ole boys club wanted blood, literally. Several times of the course of his life, they tried to stone him, whip him, and confine him.

He was currently under arrest when he wrote these words.

Learned Contentment

Notice the phrase Paul used about contentment – ***I have learned***, which means it didn't come naturally and it didn't happen all at once. Last week we talked through something called the *process of sanctification* – learning to grow in maturity through knowledge, time, and experience. Paul did not *know* how to be content until he was forced to learn contentment through a variety of situations and circumstances.

Here's a rundown of what helped Paul learn contentment:

Frequently imprisoned.

Faced death often.

Stoned.

Wrongly accused/false accusations – continually.

Sleepless, Hungry, Thirsty.

Carried a thorn in the flesh.

In peril of my own countrymen – in Damascus, Jerusalem, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth.

In peril in the wilderness – weather & wild beasts, snake bite, cold, nakedness, and robbers.

Abandoned by his friends.

Despaired for his life.

Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.

II Corinthians 11:24-31

Learned Who Is In Control

A large part of what Paul has *learned* is that he cannot control what happens to him.

In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Philippians 4:12-13

Going back to our statement of contentment: we don't start out being *satisfied* with what we have and where we are. At first, it's *just okay...whatever*. Over time, we grow in contentment – because our identity is not found in what we have or our status in life, but in Jesus Christ.

I can do all things – is not Paul claiming that he can simply decide to do whatever he wants to do. Instead, it's his claim on contentment – that his identity and fulfillment are not wrapped up in his current situation. And that no matter what his season of life might be, no matter what difficulty he is experiencing, no matter how much pain he is currently experiencing – he can do *all* things...but not in his own power and strength – but through ***Jesus Christ who gives me strength***.

Crushing Expectations

When expectations are crushed under the weight of reality and disappointment, it is an opportunity for us to *learn* that our contentment doesn't not come from the things around us, but the One who lives within us.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:2

Contentment is learned through the lifelong process of focusing our eyes, attention, hopes, and dreams on Christ; becoming satisfied in who He is and what He has called us to.