

More or Less

Part 3 – Emotional Discontent

Intro

Over the course of this month, we will have been addressing 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 or happen like we had planned them in our minds. 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.

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

King Ahab

Ahab was king of Israel [God's people] in 874BC. He had a difficult act to follow. The long line of kings in their history included the great and valiant David and the wise and master builder Solomon. Ahab appears as king nearly 55 years after Solomon's reign. Not long enough for David and Solomon to be forgotten. Every king who came after lived within their shadow.

Unfortunately, most of the kings who followed were wicked and evil. An astounding 19 kings in a row fit this mold. Ahab was the 8th of 19.

Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him.

I Kings 16:30

His desire for **more** is found in the verse following his death.

Now the rest of the acts of Ahab and all that he did, and the ivory house that he built and all the cities that he built, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel?

I Kings 22:39

This statement about his life speaks to his propensity for excess – more than what was needed. And we would naturally think *he's just simply greedy*, and he is. But there is something much deeper than simply a desire for more – as the king, he could have had nearly anything he wanted. For Ahab, it seems to be emotional, as if he is trying to find fulfillment and satisfaction through the things he is chasing. Watch his emotional responses as we walk through parts of his story.

I Kings 20

Ahab had already endured a threatening drought that led to a severe famine. Had a run-in with the prophet Elijah, who defeated most of his [and his wife's] prophets – in convincing fashion. Was now about to face an attack by neighboring kings and kingdoms. His self-esteem was at an all-time low

Ben-hadad, king of Syria, gathered together an army to attack Ahab and the people of Israel. This was no regular skirmish. Ben-hadad wasn't playing games. He amassed an army that included 32 other kings. He sent messengers to Ahab that said ***your silver and gold are mine; your best wives and children also are mine.***

I Kings 20:3

Ahab had no other choice but to relent. Ben-hadad's messengers came a second time. But on this occasion, they requested access, not to the city and the people's possessions, but to Ahab's palace and all of his possessions and household. Ahab is like, *look, you can have all their stuff...but I'm not giving you mine.* He sends word to his people to get ready for war.

Ahab gathers over 7,000 men ready for battle. They surprised Ben-hadad and defeated his army in the hills with relative ease. However, Ben-hadad escapes death and capture. Over course of the winter months, Ben-hadad regathers an army – this time with more military-minded generals at the helm. These men are convinced the reason they lost was the topography of the battlefield.

Their faulty belief was ***The Lord is a god of the hills but he is not a god of the valleys. I Kings 20:28***

In the hills, the Syrians chariots and horses were of no use. But in the valleys, the Syrians believed they had the advantage. *Surely, the Israelite God is not the Lord over all the earth [and all circumstances].* For 6 days, the Syrian and Ben-hadad believed they had the upper hand. They stood and intimidated the fledgling Israelites with sheer size and intimidation.

20:27

The people of Israel encamped before them like two little flocks of goats, but the Syrians filled the country.

However, on the 7th day, as the armies ran toward one another in battle, the tiny army of God [led by Ahab] slayed 100,000 Syrian foot soldiers – in a day!

[God truly is a God of the hills AND the valleys – the highs & the lows.]

Ben-hadad fled once again. He knew he was defeated, & likely faced death, so he devised a plan to play on Ahab's self-esteem & emotions.

20:34

And Ben-hadad said to him, "The cities that my father took from your father I will restore, and you may establish bazaars for yourself in Damascus, as my father did in Samaria." And Ahab said, "I will let you go on these terms." So he made a covenant with him and let him go.

Ahab had gone from a king with nothing to show, a king likely forgotten in the annals of history, to a king who might be known for regaining and expanding the territory of Israel like few other kings before him. This would put him on the same level as David and Solomon. He would be esteemed, remembered for establishing commerce and trade for the Israelite people...gaining hold of the trading privileges in Damascus.

His emotions ran wild. *I can have, literally, anything I want.*

However, in gaining power, control, and wealth, Ahab had directly defied the command and will of God. Instead of destroying an enemy of God, Ahab became friends. More than friends. He entered a covenant with God's enemy for his own personal gain.

And haven't we all been there before? We know exactly what God requires and has planned for us, yet we decide to take matters into our own hands. What God has promised [sometimes] is simply not enough, so we venture off on our own path – convinced that we know how to provide for ourselves better than He.

So God sends a prophet to Ahab with a warning and a call to repentance.

20:42-43

Because you have let go out of your hand the man whom I had devoted to destruction, therefore your life shall be for his life, and your people for his people. And the king of Israel went to his house vexed and sullen and came to Samaria.

Ahab simply doesn't know how things got to this point. Rebuked by a *lowly prophet* and cursed by God, Ahab is confused, sad, and angry.

I Kings 21

Instead of repenting for his decision to chase after material possessions, disobeying the command of God, Ahab decides to try and satisfy/appease his emotions with *more*.

21:1-2

Now Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel, beside the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. And after this Ahab said to Naboth, "Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near my house, and I will give you a better vineyard for it; or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its value in money."

Ahab attempts to *feel better* about himself and his place in life by *purchasing more*. It's the human way. Feel crummy about your day, buy something – it will make you feel better. End a difficult relationship, go get something for yourself – you deserve it. Since the beginning of time, this is how mankind has dealt with discontentment. We allow our emotional state to dictate our level of contentment, which causes us to desire what we currently do not have or what someone else around us does.

21:3

But Naboth said to Ahab, "The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers."

It was against God's command to sell the land. And, once again, Ahab is forced to go home saddened by his current state in life.

21:4

And Ahab went into his house vexed and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said to him, for he had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." And he lay down on his bed and turned away his face and would eat no food.

You know how your kids walk in, tail tucked between their legs, refusing to eat because someone said something mean to them on the playground? Or how your teenager won't come out of the room – and they lay on the bed all evening and night, with sounds of whimper coming through the cracks of their door. This is a grown man, a king nonetheless. Pouting, refusing to eat, because he didn't get what he wanted.

The Plot Against Naboth

Ahab's wife sees her husband's displeasure and devises a plan to have 2 *worthless* men drum up inaccurate charges against Naboth – for which the leaders of the people would immediately charge, convict, and execute Naboth.

21:15-16

As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, Jezebel said to Ahab, “Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money, for Naboth is not alive, but dead.” And as soon as Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab arose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

While we may never plot and scheme to have someone removed so that we can take their possessions, all of us have found ourselves in that place of plotting and scheming how we could get, acquire, and attain *more* – in an attempt to satisfy our emotional discontent.

And haven't we all assumed that *once I get [that], my life will be better, and I will be happier with my place in life.* How many times have we allowed an emotional moment of discontent cause us to long for more material things, instead of drive us to our deeper need of God?

But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.

1 Timothy 6:6-8

Godliness is not about acquiring better and more material things; it is instead an active life of faith, a living out of covenant faithfulness in relation to God, that finds sufficiency and contentment in Christ alone whatever one's outward circumstances might be.

Philip H. Towner – New International Commentary