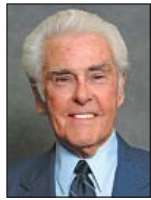


# Our need for contentment

What do you need to be content with your place in life? The dictionary defines contentment as



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satisfied, adequately happy, being in a satisfied state, tranquil happiness. How do these terms measure up to your own definition of contentment? Probably some of them at least give consideration to how you feel when you are content.

Advertisements are created on the premise that the advertised product or experience will meet a need or give contentment. Such contentment may be only temporarily dependent on circumstances or it may be significant enough to be with you for a lifetime. The sixth chapter of John's Gospel opens with Jesus feeding 5,000 men plus women and children. This may have been the most fulfilling meal that many of the crowd had had for a long time. Since 12 small baskets of leftovers were gathered, everybody had enough.

**Too often, people find satisfaction in things that don't last (John 6:26-27).** On the day following the big feast, the crowd discovered that Jesus and his disciples were gone. Surmising that they had taken a boat and traveled to Capernaum on the other side of the lake, the crowd got into several boats and went to Capernaum to search for Jesus.

When they found Jesus, they tried to cover up their reason for seeking him by asking, "When did you get here?" Jesus saw through their question and declared, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life."

It would be possible for the crowd (and us) to interpret Jesus as rejecting the physical need for bread.

But after all, he had just fed 5,000 men plus women and children with physical bread that came from God. Both the Old and New Testaments describe bread as God's gift to his people. The psalmist points out that God brings food from the earth: "wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains the heart" (104:14-15). Another psalm describes God's peoples' need for contentment: "They asked and he brought them quail and satisfied them with bread from heaven" (105:40).

As taught by Jesus, the Lord's Prayer says, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). There are millions of hungry men, women and children whose fervent prayer is for physical bread to overcome starvation. For example, a letter crossed my desk today from the Children's Hunger Relief Fund that declared, "We are halfway towards our goal of providing over 70,000 meals to our partners in Burundi, Africa, for 250 school children." Such efforts are needed and existent in the United States as well as overseas.

**Biblically, contentment comes as spiritual nurture from God through Christ (John 6:34-35).** Jesus sought to help the primarily Jewish crowd to become responsive to spiritual contentment as well as physical hunger. When they learned from the Lord that the manna from Moses and the feeding of the 5,000 were both gifts of God, they prayed that the bread of heaven was their deep need: "Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread."

It seems obvious that their minds were still on the need for physical bread to help them deal with the daily need to feed their families. The biggest challenge Jesus had as he taught them in the Capernaum synagogue (John 6:59) was to enlarge their minds to spiritual realities rather than remaining focused on physical need.

Perhaps we recognize that it is also

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our greatest challenge. We can focus on physical hunger of many people, the need for physical healing in our fellowship and in the world, seeking guidance in vocational choices but not growing in our awareness of and standing for spiritual growth. We need that contentment.

**People who put their trust in Jesus achieve the fulfilling contentment that is offered in him (John 6:36-40).** When Jesus was confronted by Satan in his temptation experiences, Satan tempted him: "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4).

We will note that Jesus did not reject dependence on physical bread for people's needs but also focused on the spiritual bread that comes from God. The most significant gift from God is Jesus himself: "I am the bread of life." A major characteristic of the bread of God "is that it giveth life to the world; a fuller life giving power than that of the manna is implied; and it is of universal application" (The Expositors Greek Testament, "Matthew," p. 753).

The request from his hearers led Jesus to make his most dramatic definition of his ministry. In verse 40, Jesus declares, "For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

The meaning of the metaphor that Jesus uses, "by eating the flesh of the Son of Man" is to believe in Jesus for our salvation. To have confidence about our future gives contentment to our daily life and experience.

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