

The Secret of Contentment

How much do you depend on others for your contentment? It is easy to blame others when things don't go the way we would like.

The problem with depending on others for contentment is that it generates an attitude of fear, anxiety, and powerlessness. We become needy of the affirmation of others, looking for confirmation that we are adequate and competent. When we do not find this kind of validation, it leads to a victimized way of thinking about ourselves and the world around us, as well as a sense of hopelessness.

Each of us has the ability to exercise greater control in our thinking and to take responsibility for ourselves and our circumstances. While we cannot control all the situations around us, we can control what we think, do and say in any given situation. When we understand that our value and identity do not lie in what those around us think, what they say, or in their judgment of us, we are free to take responsibility for ourselves.

2 Timothy 1: 7 says, "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline." It's up to each child of God to claim that power and choose to exercise it in our lives. Once we can internalize the truth that we are valuable in God's eyes and that He ultimately is in control, the ability to love others and feel confident about ourselves is a natural consequence.

When we assume responsibility for our own contentment, it enables us to establish our priorities, set standards for our character, and define our own values. It empowers us to focus on what we do, instead of what others do. Rather than focus on our failures and problems, we can hone in on steps we can take to make change, goals we can set, and a vision to work toward. Our thinking takes on a more holistic view of what is truly important.

When facing trying situations, we can ask ourselves, "What do I need to change about the way I am thinking about this situation?", "Is there some action I need to take to make the situation better?", "Am I exaggerating the circumstances?", "How does this problem measure up to what's most important in my life?", "What is God trying to teach me through these circumstances?"

If you are dealing with a situation over which you have no control, you can always manage the way you are handling it internally through prayer, spiritual submission, or

forgiveness. Often, letting go of conditions over which we have no control is the most empowering choice we can make. We will always be affected to some degree by our circumstances, but as we grow in our grace, contentment and spiritual maturity, the effects of our circumstances on our contentment can become less and less.

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