

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Four Misconceptions about

Contentment

MELISSA B. KRUGER



Wandering in Unbelief

One of our greatest struggles with contentment is that we often have an incorrect picture of what it means to be content. It's helpful to understand what something *is not* in order to have a more correct understanding of what *it is*. Paul learned contentment, but we can gain a better picture of what that really looked like from what he shared about his life with the churches to whom he wrote. From Paul's letters, below are four things contentment is not.

1. Contentment is not a carefree existence.

Contentment isn't having it all together and finding a life of perfect balance. Nor is it an idyllic moment spent swinging on a hammock, sipping lemonade, and reading a book on a cool fall afternoon, while all the world around you falls apart. Paul's description of his time in Asia probably wouldn't make the Facebook feed:

For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. ([2 Cor. 1:8](#))

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Burdened, afflicted, despairing—these descriptions are not in opposition to a contented soul. In this world we won't be free of hardship. Contentment trusts God while walking through the hard. Joy and sorrow can walk side by side and not be in opposition to each other.

2. Contentment is not the absence of relational conflicts and anguish of heart.

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Paul had his share of relational disagreements, even departing from Barnabas over a dispute regarding Mark ([Acts 15:39](#)). In the midst of deep affection, ministry included relational anguish:

I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you. ([2 Cor. 2:4](#))

Loving others means our hearts will be for them. Contentment is not an indifferent disposition toward others. Instead, we should expect that the depth of our love for one another will involve tears—we weep when others weep and feel compassion in their pain. Contentment is not in opposition to longing for the day when heartache will be over and tears will be no more.

3. Contentment is not a life without longing and groaning in our distress.

When we mistakenly view contentment as an endlessly positive Pollyanna attitude, we miss entering more deeply into relationship with Jesus. Jesus was troubled in soul on the eve of his crucifixion and in agony prayed multiple times to the Father for rescue ([Luke 22:44](#)). Paul described his own experience with similar distress: “In this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling” ([2 Cor. 5:2](#)).

Contentment does not mean that we are free from desires, longings, or heart-wrenching circumstances. If you are hurting or someone you love needs healing, cry out to God in prayer. Contentment isn't apathy or a sort of “grin and bear it” mentality. We can seek solutions and help in our trials. We can tell others we are suffering. Crying out to God for relief is not in opposition to contentment.

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4. Contentment is not freedom from fear and anxiety.

Paul explained the state of his circumstances and inner turmoil in stark detail:

Even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within. ([2 Cor. 7:5](#))

Paul faced outward danger and inward fear. He bore daily pressure and anxiety for all the churches under his care ([2 Cor. 11:28](#)). He did not hide his struggles, both physical and emotional. Yet he took his fears and anxieties to the Lord and experienced peace in the midst of them. As he instructed the Philippians:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ([Phil. 4:6–7](#))

Paul learned the secret of contentment not by freeing himself from earthly struggles or burdens but by experiencing the power of Christ's presence in both his times of plenty and times of want. He embraced Christ's goodness in the midst of life's hardness. All of Paul's life testified: *Christ is enough. It is well with my soul.*

This article is adapted from *Growing Together: Taking Mentoring beyond Small Talk and Prayer Requests* by Melissa B. Kruger.



Melissa Kruger (BA, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) serves as vice president of discipleship programming for the Gospel Coalition (TGC). She's the author of multiple books, including *The Envy of Eve*; *Walking with God in the Season of Motherhood*; *Growing Together*; and *Wherever You Go, I Want You to Know*. Her husband, Mike, is the president of Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, and they have three children.

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