



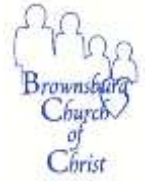
Be Content this Christmas

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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AM Assembly



Introduction:

“Now is the winter of our discontent...” This is the opening phrase of Shakespeare’s play *Richard III*. In the play it means something completely different than I hear in the phrase. However, I think it is a great phrase to describe how a lot of us get around Christmas. Instead of allowing this time of year to be a joyous celebration of making it through another year, we get discontented with all the things that didn’t work out the way we hoped. We become discontent as our gifts don’t measure up to what others received or were able to give. December becomes the winter of our discontent. I remember Paul’s statement in **Philippians 4:11-13**. “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. I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (ESV). This is a truly profound statement considering it was written by the same person who claimed in **Romans 7:7-8** that covetousness of every kind was the thing that destroyed his soul. He had learned to be content. How can we learn contentment? How can the winter of our discontent be made a glorious summer by the Son of God?

Discussion:

- I. Recognize that everyone goes through times of being brought low.
 - A. If you are facing a tough time, whether at this time of year or any other, it is easy to think that God must be punishing you or picking on you. Often times, we look at tough times the same way Job’s friends did. When something is going wrong for us or others, we can quickly jump to the conclusion that somebody must have done something wrong, made a mistake, or fallen into sin. That is not necessarily the case.
 - B. Look at Paul’s hardships in **II Corinthians 11:23-28**. Was Paul being punished or picked on? Should he assume this was happening because he had made mistakes or committed sins in his decision to do the Lord’s work? What about Joseph in **Genesis 37-40**? Was he sold into slavery and then put into prison because he made a mistake in his choices or committed sins? What about Jesus? When He said He had nowhere to lay his head in **Matthew 8:20**, did that mean He was being punished? Was He hung on the cross because God was picking on Him and punishing Him for the choices He made?
 - C. Obviously not. Come to grips with this. Everyone goes through times of lack and being brought low. It doesn’t mean you are being punished or picked on. It’s just part of the world we live in.
- II. Count your own blessings, not everyone else’s.
 - A. The easiest way to be discontent is to spend your time comparing your own blessings to everyone else’s. There can only be one most blessed person and one least blessed person in the world. Unless you are one of these two people, you will always be able to find others who are either more blessed or less blessed than you. But what good does this comparison game get you? So someone else is having an easier time than you are; what does that prove?
 - B. In **Philippians 4:6**, Paul says we should let our requests be made known with thanksgiving. That is, while we do think about the things we want, we recognize the great blessings God has given us and we are thankful. Consider the list of blessings Paul mentions in **Ephesians 1:3-14**. Then notice the contentment Paul talked about in **I Timothy 6:6-8**. Let’s not lose sight of what a wonderful blessing it is to have food and clothes. Can we learn to be content with that like Paul was? Finally, don’t forget what God said to Paul in **II Corinthians 12:9-10**. Do you ever count God’s grace when you count your blessings? Is it sufficient for you or does He have to add a certain amount of money and other blessings in the pot for it to count?
 - C. Couple this with point #1 and you get an interesting picture. As **II Corinthians 8:13-14** demonstrates, sometimes you are the one lacking, while someone else abounds; sometimes vice versa. While you are busy comparing your lack with someone else’s blessings now, a few years ago or a few years from now the picture may be reversed. So what good does it do to compare right now. Quit counting everyone else’s blessings and just count your own.
 - D. If you find yourself being discontented this time of year, why not write a gratitude list. Think of all the things you do have to be thankful for. And please, do not give the sinful cop-out that you’ve got nothing. And you heard me correctly. That is a sinful cop-out because you serve a good God who has blessed you. You need to thank Him.
- III. Focus on your relationship with God.
 - A. There are a number of reasons you might be discontent. Maybe you feel financially discontent. You might also feel relationally discontent. Maybe you feel like you’ve reached an age where you should have accomplished

something and you haven't yet, so you feel discontent. The problem is when you focus on all these things, you focus on fickle things that can't last. As **Matthew 6:19-21** explains, financial blessings don't last. While relationships are better, people are fickle. They let us down. And if we are expecting contentment to come from our accomplishments, we'll only end up like the dog chasing his tail. Contentment will always allude us because we'll always think we should have done just a little more. What's the answer to this dilemma?

- B. Put your contentment in your relationship with God. **Hebrews 13:5** says, "Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'" (ESV). The Hebrew writer is not saying be content with the money you have. He is saying don't put your contentment in money; put it in God who promises to stay with you. We need to work on being like the psalmist in **Psalms 73:25**—"Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you" (ESV). When we develop a desire for a relationship with God and then increase our faith in that relationship, we can learn some contentment no matter what we face here on earth.
- C. So, spend some time in prayer. Spend some time in the Word. If you're feeling discontent, tell God about it. Let Him know what you are thinking and feeling. That is how relationships are developed. Then open the Bible and let it start guiding you in improving your side of the relationship with God. As your faith increases, your contentment will as well. In **Philippians 4:13**, Paul said he could do all things through Jesus or God who strengthened him. He knew he could face his tough times based on his relationship with God.

IV. Accept, don't expect.

- A. Notice again Paul's statement in **Philippians 4:11-12**. There is a subtle principle embedded in this passage. For too often, the reason we are discontented is because we expected something different than the way things are. Sometimes this is with big decisions. We got a new job and expected all kinds of benefits and financial blessings. We married a spouse and expected all kinds of marital bliss all the time. We moved and expected everything to go smoothly. We became a Christian and we expected everything in our life to turn up roses. Sometimes this is with small decisions. We came home from work and expected our spouse and kids to greet us at the door with smiles and excitement. We visited a new restaurant and expected the food to be amazing. We saw a movie recommended by a friend and expected it to be stellar. When our expectations aren't met, we feel cheated. Some cosmic principle in the universe has been unjustly violated. We have no peace because our expectations aren't being met.
- B. What we need to learn to do is to accept things the way they are. I'm not saying we can't have the kind of constructive discontent that prompts us to do better work on the job or accomplish more in a field of endeavor. The problem is when things don't go the way we expected and all we do is focus on our expectations, we feel helpless and trapped in our discontent. I know a person who gets so trapped in her expectations that when things don't go the way she expected, all she can do is sit there and argue with you about how it was supposed to go a certain way. You can spend minutes, hours, days trapped in this expectation. But when you focus on acceptance, this picture changes. Things are the way they are. You can't change the way things are. All you can do is accept they are the way they are and change how you respond to them.
- C. On those days when Paul was brought low and in lack, he had a choice. He could spend all his time focusing on the expectations. Then he would be trapped in his despair. Or he could focus on acceptance. Things are the way they are. Then he could think about his next step in his relationship with God. What is truly amazing is when you focus on the acceptance and work on you, rather than the expectations and just hope things change, you will be surprised to find out that things often change in response to your acceptance and personal change.

V. Serve others.

- A. I'm truly intrigued by Paul's statement in **Philippians 4:14-17**. When the Philippians shared with Paul, he wasn't nearly as focused on the help it gave him. He was focused on the fruit it produced for the Philippians. There are two sides of this statement. First, notice that Paul was thinking more about others than himself, even in his time of need. Second, notice that serving Paul produced good fruit for the Philippians.
- B. Both sides of this teach us a lesson. Often, when we are in the midst of discontent, we start to get myopic. We can't see past ourselves and our own trouble. If we want to get back to contentment, we need to get outside ourselves. We need to serve others. We need to perform acts of love and service. Go visit someone in the hospital. Write someone a letter. Make a meal for someone who is in worse shape than you. You'll be amazed at what getting out of your own mess and serving someone else will do for your own serenity and contentment.

Conclusion:

"Now is the winter of our discontent..." Don't let this December be a winter of discontent for you. Let it be turned into a glorious summer of contentment and serenity. Then glorify God for His blessings in your life.