

# SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

## CONTENTMENT



**BIG IDEA:** Everyone seeks contentment. As Christians we need to “learn to be content” in difficult situations like Paul. We need to experience God’s presence and power in the storms of life, like the psalmist in Psalm 73.

It’s crucial for your group to realize, as Paul did, that we must *learn* to be content. We learn this skill as we face life’s challenges and claim the promises of God’s peace, presence, power and provision. When we are in the midst of a demanding situation, we can choose to use it as an opportunity to experience God’s presence in a deeper way; or we can become bitter. We can choose to trust that God is powerful enough to take care of us in the situation; or we can complain and whine. We can choose to genuinely and sincerely believe that He will provide; or we can languish in our doubts that God will work.



**DESIRED LIFE CHANGE:** In this study the student should begin to recognize that God, and what He chooses to provide at any given moment is all he really needs. He should realize how to experience God’s presence, power, and provision in the midst of life’s challenges.



**AUDIENCE:** This study is designed for students who are solid Christians who’ve completed basic level studies.



**LEADER’S PREPARATION:** Read 2 Corinthians 11:22-30 for background and compare it with the text of Philippians 4:11-13. Be prepared to share your story related to this topic. Let your group know the difference these truths have made in your life.



## AT A GLANCE

As your group interacts in this study, they will think . . .

This is my **WORLD:** Life is frustrating because my desires, needs, and expectations aren’t always met.

This is my **NEED:** I will enjoy life more if I can learn to be content in all circumstances.

This is my **ANSWER:** Contentment involves recognizing that God, and what He chooses to provide at this moment, are all I need.

This is the **DIFFERENCE:** I will realize that learning to be content is a process of experiencing God’s presence, power, and provision.

This is what I’ll **DO:** When I face a difficult situation, I will ask, “Am I trusting God to be both present and powerful in this? Am I trusting Him to provide all I really need?”

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION - WHY IS THIS STUDY IMPORTANT?



Life is challenging. Difficulties abound. Circumstances overwhelm us. Even David, “a man after God’s own heart,” was brought to the point of despair (Psalm 27). Christian college students face disappointment daily, and one of the worst things we can do as we disciple students is to teach them to fake it. It’s harmful to represent the Christian life as always being “great,” “fine,” and “super.” It’s not! We should never suggest by words or example that one should ignore their problems and needs as a believer. When a person develops the habit of denying his problems or withdrawing from his problems, he becomes an emotional cripple. That is not the Biblical route to

maturity in the Christian life. The mature believer faces his problems head on! He admits his need. He even cries out to God in desperation. He is blatantly honest with God. But he doesn’t stop there.

This study takes us beyond that point and gives us a look at the inner life of two people in the Bible, Asaph and Paul. These men faced life’s challenges in a mature way. They recognized that they were “in process.” Paul realized he was still learning to be content. They experienced God’s presence, claimed His power, counted on His provision, and experienced His peace. That is the message we need to deliver to students to help them grow toward maturity

**1 ASK:** In each of the following categories ...

**NOW:**

**Relationships:**

I have several close friends; a special dating relationship; everyone likes me

**Achievements:**

I am at the top of my class in my major; several companies want to hire me

**Possessions:**

I have a full scholarship; plenty of money; drive an expensive car; have all the latest fashions in my wardrobe

**Looks:**

I look great-perfect face and body; everyone wants to be around me; mega social life

**Popularity:**

everyone likes me; I am included in every major social event; I feel loved and accepted; I'm very popular

**FUTURE:**

**Relationships:**

perfect marriage; sharp kids; fun family that is admired by others; lots of friends that I enjoy being with

**Achievements:**

I am nationally and internationally recognized as one of the best in my field and I am making a lot of money

**Possessions:**

I have enough money for houses, cars, toys, and vacation spots in Colorado, Hawaii and Europe

**Looks:**

I am frequently asked to be a model or up-front person at major events; age has not changed my looks much


**Popularity:**

everyone likes me; I am included in the social scene

**2 DISCUSS & ASK**

**3 READ & ASK**

**4 STATE:** We have seen two people who struggle with being content. Let's look at a biblical perspective on contentment.



VERSION 1.1

# SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

**TOOLBOX**

- THINK
- OBSERVE
- CLOSE-UP
- WRITE
- DISCUSS
- FEELINGS
- BRAINSTORM
- REFERENCE
- PASSAGE
- ARTICLE
- BIG IDEA
- CROSSROAD

**What would it take to make you completely content?**

	NOW	FUTURE
Relationships		
Achievements		
Possessions		
Looks		
Popularity		

**DISCUSS**


Billionaire industrialist John D. Rockefeller was once asked, "How much does it take to satisfy a man?" With rare wisdom he answered, "A little bit more than he has."

**Why is it that people always need more to be satisfied?**


**KELLY'S STORY**

Kelly became a Christian in high school. When she came to college, she wanted to get involved in a Christian organization. She met some people with Campus Crusade and started going to a Bible study. She likes all the activities that Crusade has to offer and goes to almost everything. But inside, she feels like she's on a roller coaster spiritually and that something just isn't right. She admits she's usually too busy between school, working out, and activities to have much time to spend alone with God, but she goes to Crusade events and activities hoping they will do the trick.

**What's missing?**



"Thou hast created us for Thyself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee."  
-St. Augustine



**1 READ**

**2 READ**

**3 ASK**

**RESPONSES:**

Situation: he is bitter, hurt, and emotionally out of control to the point of being senseless, ignorant, and like a beast

Solution: he becomes aware of God's Presence and God's Power

Presence: he realizes in a fresh way that God is with him (v. 23,25,28), that the Father takes his hand in difficult times (v. 23), and He counsels and guides him through the tough times (v. 24), and promises him the hope of eternal life (v. 24)

Power: he realizes that God is powerful enough to meet his every need; he recognizes that God is indeed his "strength" and his "portion," all he needs

**4 READ**

**5 READ**

**6 ASK**

RESPONSES: he is in prison; there are major conflicts with the church in Philippi and that disappoints him; the Philippians had sent him a financial gift to meet his needs and he is grateful the solution was to learn to be content whether he had financial help or not; he had learned to get along with very little or with plenty

**7 ASK**

RESPONSE: it is a secret because most people have not discovered the incredible blessing of trusting God to meet them at every point of need and provide for them there; he does not want to keep it a secret; therefore, he writes this key principle, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me"

**8 ASK**

RESPONSE: it implies that all of us need to "learn to be content"; learning is a process that certainly involves trusting God to strengthen us to do all things; each time we take a step of faith and move out in the strength He supplies we grow in our ability to be content

LEADER'S NOTE: The secret of contentment is twofold. First, we recognize that becoming content in all situations is a "learning process." Second, the basis for our contentment is depending on God and trusting Him to strengthen us with His power in any difficulty.

**PSALMIST**

**Psalm 73:21-28**

When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you.

Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.

**CONTEXT**

This Psalm was written by Asaph, a musician in the time of King David. He was appointed minister of music in the Temple (1 Chronicles 15:19; 16:5) and his descendants were also official musicians. Asaph struggled with the perplexing issue of the prosperity of the wicked, and the apparent lack of reward for the righteous (73:1-14).

How would you describe the Psalmist's situation? What would you say he recognized as the solution to his need?

**CONTEXT**

Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians from a prison in Rome, where he was imprisoned for being an instigator of new beliefs. First, he encourages them to stand fast against the opposition from pagans and Judaizers. Second, he encourages them to rejoice and not be anxious in trials (3:1;4:4,6,7) using himself as an example because he was able to rejoice in imprisonment (1:18). Third, he exhorts them to walk together in unity (1:27-2:11), and finally, Paul thanks them for their financial gift (4:10-18).

**PAUL**

**Philippians 4:11-13**

I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

What was Paul's situation? What would you say he recognized as the solution to his need?

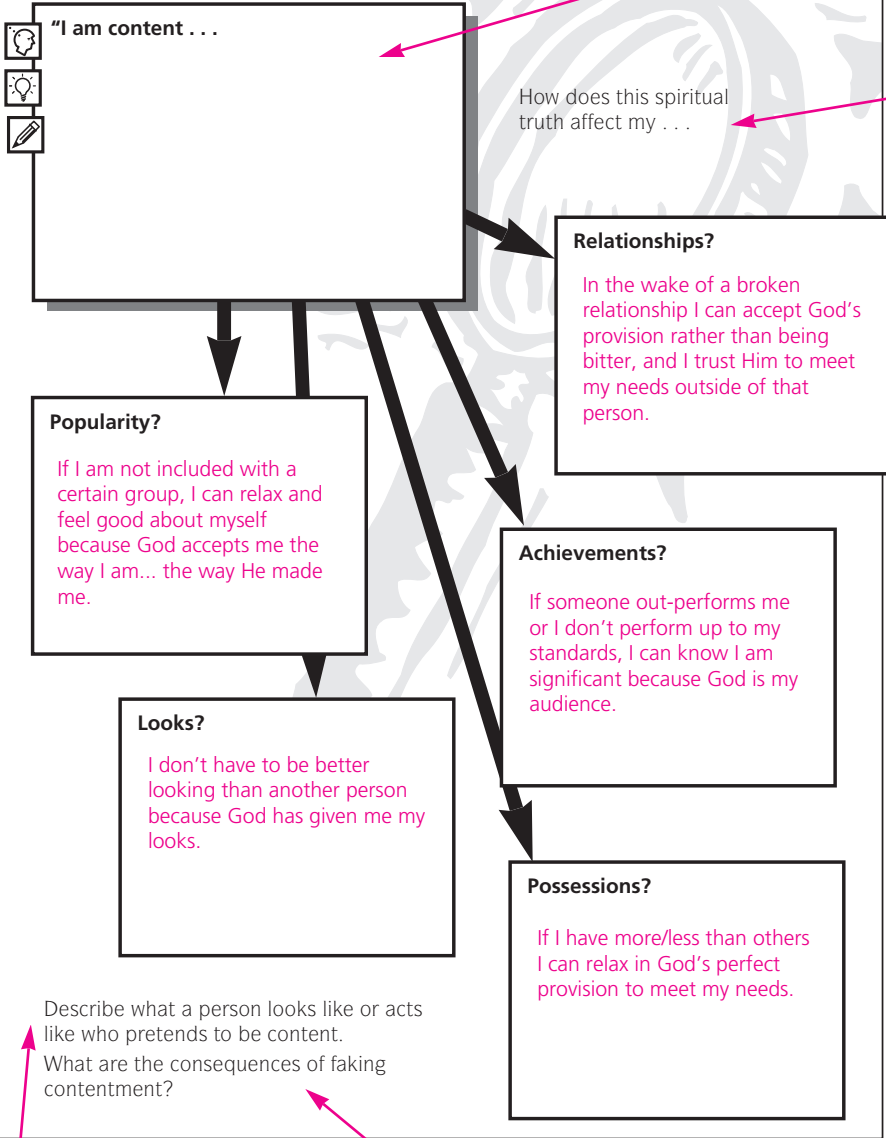
Paul talks about the secret of being content in all kinds of circumstances. How would you define "the secret" according to Paul? Why do you think Paul calls it a secret? What does that imply?

*There is no pit so deep that God is not deeper still.*

-Corrie Ten Boom (Nazi concentration camp survivor)

**9 READ & ASK:** How might this quote relate to contentment?

The Secret:



**1 STATE:** I am content when I recognize that God, and what He chooses to provide at this moment, is all I need.

**2 ASK**

How does this spiritual truth affect my ...

**Relationships?**

In the wake of a broken relationship I can accept God's provision rather than being bitter, and I trust Him to meet my needs outside of that person.

**Popularity?**

If I am not included with a certain group, I can relax and feel good about myself because God accepts me the way I am... the way He made me.

**Achievements?**

If someone out-performs me or I don't perform up to my standards, I can know I am significant because God is my audience.

**Looks?**

I don't have to be better looking than another person because God has given me my looks.

**Possessions?**

If I have more/less than others I can relax in God's perfect provision to meet my needs.

Describe what a person looks like or acts like who pretends to be content.  
What are the consequences of faking contentment?

**3 DESCRIBE**

they appear to be happy all of the time, but under pressure they may explode; or in their private world they suppress their problems and deal with depression as a result; they seem "unreal,"; they hyper-spiritualize life by constantly saying "God will fix everything," "I'll just trust God with this," "Isn't God great?"; while they are actually hiding from reality

**4 ASK**

when we ignore our feelings of hurt, pain, and disappointment we become emotionally crippled; we can't allow God to work on our behalf to help us through the tough times if we refuse to admit to ourselves and to Him that we are hurting; faking happiness or contentment is essentially being dishonest with ourselves and God; we are running from our problems and that is unhealthy; we need to face problems head on and give them to God- standing in readiness to obey

God as He directs; we can't hear the voice of God related to our needs if we are living in the commotion of denial and withdrawal

**5 STATE:** Knowing "the secret" from the Scripture is the crucial first step. The second step is learning "the secret" in our experience. Let's look now at how to learn it.

The Secret:

**"I am content . . .**

I am content when I recognize that God, and what He chooses to provide at this moment, is all I need.



Moving this principle from my head to my heart.

**FLASHBACK**

Think of a past, difficult situation in which you lacked contentment. What would have been different if you had acknowledged ...

1. Who God is, and
2. That His provision was sufficient?

**APPLY**

A current situation:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

How can I apply the "secret" to each situation?

**LORI'S STORY**

In high school, I looked like I had it all together. I made good grades, was very involved in school and social activities, had plenty of friends, and a steady boyfriend. But then I went to college and everything changed. I was stripped of my security and felt like just another face in the crowd. So .... back to the old drawing board I went, searching for complete satisfaction in achievements and people. One day, C.J., a woman on staff with Campus Crusade for Christ, explained the gospel to me. At that point, I realized that though I'd been to church and heard about God, I'd never experienced a personal relationship with Him. C.J. helped me see that I could never find lasting happiness in my achievements, or in the approval of others. Those could never meet my deepest needs. I realized through this experience that only God could supply me with genuine contentment and peace.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are taken from the *New International Version*, ©1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Published by Zondervan Bible Publishers, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

**1 STATE:** The principle we have learned from the scripture is ...

**2 STATE:** Let's see how to move this principle from our heads to our heart.

**3 ASK:** Think of a past difficult situation in which you lacked contentment. What would have been different if you had acknowledged ... 1. Who God is, and 2. That His provision was sufficient?

**RESPONSE:** I would have relaxed in the experiential knowledge of God's presence; I would have drawn contentment from the knowledge of His power and provision, and said to myself, "Be calm because He can do anything!"

**FOLLOW UP:** What would be different about your "self-talk"? Attitude? Feelings?

**RESPONSE:** I would have said to myself, "He is here with me and that is all I need!"; I would have said to myself, "Be calm, because God can do anything!" my attitude would be, "I am going to make it; my hope is in Him, not circumstances"; I would have yielded my feelings of hopelessness to Him and asked Him to give me hope; I would have chosen to walk by faith, and not lived in despair

**4 ASK:** How can I apply "the secret" to each situation? [Give them time to think and write]

**5 READ**

**6 ASK**  
**POSSIBLE RESPONSE:** ontentment and peace through a personal relationship with Christ; Christ is sufficient



**BOOKS FOR FURTHER STUDY**

*Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back* – Chuck Swindoll

*Happiness is a Choice* – Minirth and Meyer

*Changes That Heal* – Henry Cloud

*The Practice of Godliness* – Jerry Bridges (NavPress)



**TOPIC CONNECTIONS**

Related *InterACTA*

small group studies: *Get Real; Extreme Love; Stress; The Truth About You*

**DIGGING DEEPER**

The following excerpt from Jerry Bridges' book, "The Practice of Godliness", would be an excellent tool for helping your students dig deeper into the subject of contentment. You may want to copy this for each student and give it to them at the end of the study. Encourage them to take it home, read it, think about it during the week, and be prepared to discuss it next week as a review. You could use questions like, "What is the main point of this article?" "How does it increase our understanding of contentment?" "How might a person apply it?"

Contentment is one of the most distinguishing traits of the godly person, because a godly person has his heart focused on God rather than on possessions or position or power. The words that are rendered as "content" or "contentment" in our English Bible actually mean "sufficiency." The same word translated "contentment" in 1 Timothy 6:6 is rendered "all that you need" or "all sufficiency" in 2 Corinthians 9:8. When God said to Paul, "my grace is sufficient for you," (2 Corinthians 12:9), He used the same word translated elsewhere as "be content" (see Luke 3:14; 1 Timothy 6:8; Hebrews 13:5).

The contented person experiences the sufficiency of God's provision for his needs and the sufficiency of God's grace for his circumstances. He believes God will indeed meet all his material needs and that he will work all his circumstances for his good.

A Christian may be winning the battle for contentment with regard to possessions and position and still lose the struggle for contentment with the providence of God in his life. We live in a sin-cursed world, where even creation itself is subjected to frustration (Romans 8:20). Christians are not immune from the frustrating, irritating, often overwhelming circumstances of life. But as Christians we believe that all circumstances come to us, not by chance, but through the often unfathomable will of an all-wise, all-powerful, and all-loving Father. Because of this we refer to our circumstances as being under the providence of God, the word providence basically meaning God's care of and control over all the universe.

Surrounded by opportunities to be disappointed, how can we learn, as Paul did, "to be content whatever the circumstances" (Philippians 4:11)? "I have learned the secret of being content," Paul said, "in any and every situation." What "secret" had Paul learned?

This must have been the secret that Paul learned: God's grace is sufficient, whatever the circumstance. And because God's grace is sufficient, we can be content. But to experience contentment we must, as Paul did, accept that God's grace is in fact sufficient. By acceptance I mean not just theological assent to a truth, but an authentic faith in His grace in the face of trying circumstances.

Since early childhood I have suffered a vision impairment that is often frustrating, and a total hearing loss in one ear that is often embarrassing (as when people speak to me and I don't hear them, and thus appear to be ignoring them). But those are not my only physical problems. One day I stood before the bedroom mirror and named seven distinct things that were "wrong" with my body; things I had often fretted about and murmured over. That day I said, "Lord, I accept the fact that you made me the way I am, and that your grace is sufficient for all these limitations." I cannot say I have not fretted over these problems since then, but I can now say I know how to be content with them: by accepting that God's grace is sufficient. Although I do not always apply this wonderful fact, it is true and it is always available. The choice to accept it and experience contentment is mine. And the choice is yours in your particular circumstances.

Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness*, (NavPress, pp. 105-120). Used by permission.

**O V E R V I E W O F M E E T I N G T I M E**



**Planning your group session**

INTERACTION AS A GROUP	INTERACTION WITH THE STUDY & WORD	INTERACTION WITH GOD	UPCOMING INFORMATION	OTHER IDEAS
Ice breaker? Refreshments?	Provided. Add personal story?	Worship / Praise / Prayer time?	Next meeting? Special event?	Music / Video?
_____ min.	_____ min.	_____ min.	_____ min.	_____ min.

**Allocating your time**

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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