**The Myth Of Greener Grass**

**Philippians 4:11-13 KJV** Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, *therewith* to be content. **[12]** I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. **[13]** I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

1. **INTRODUCTION—WHEN GOOD PROJECTS GO SOUR**
2. **My Own Experience**

I felt wonderful. But to add to this wonderful feeling, I must admit that I was hot, tired, and a little weary. I had just finished cutting the grass, cutting the hedges, weed-eating, and edging the lawn. Sitting out back at the patio table, I surveyed the wonderful little kingdom. All was well because all of the lawn equipment had been put up and now I was drinking some pink lemonade and listening to the sprinkler tick, tick, tick in the background. A long Saturday was almost over and I had accomplished something.

So I got up to go back inside and refuel my glass of pink lemonade. Having refilled it, I headed back out the door to the patio with a sense of accomplishment and contentment about the entire project. But just as I walked out the door, I spied a Southern Living magazine that Teresa had left laying on the desk and I picked it up. That would be a huge mistake. I had not been back out for 10 minutes that the more I flipped through that magazine the more disgruntled that I become. The feelings of accomplishment and contentment had given away to envy and very high levels of discontentment. It took a total of about five minutes of looking at all the well-manicured lawns and extravagant homes to get me very dissatisfied with my lawn, my home, and every other little detail of my life.

-Suddenly, and out of nowhere, I had fallen headlong into a death trap of sins—discontentment, murmuring, complaining, and soul-draining envy had me in their clutches.

-Now whether you want to categorize those things as sin or not, you have the choice. But the more you study the Bible, the more you realize that all of those things are really missing the mark for God’s high and holy calling.

-This is one of the back doors that the devil often sneaks into and catches us blindly and chokes the gratitude out of our life.

1. **Society and Contentment**

-This is the premise that our whole society is based on.

* The car you drive is just fine—except it doesn’t have a GPS screen in the stereo system, it doesn’t have a camera to help you back up, it doesn’t have comfort controls for all passengers, it doesn’t have. . .
* The computer you have is just fine—except it doesn’t have a single mouse click device, it doesn’t have a high-def monitor, it doesn’t work at warp speed, it doesn’t have. . .
* The home you live in is just fine—except it doesn’t have a pool in the back yard, it isn’t located on High King Way, it doesn’t have a yard boy, it doesn’t have. . .
* The place you work is just fine—except it doesn’t have matching funds for the 401K, it doesn’t have free lunch opportunities, it doesn’t have a family atmosphere, it doesn’t have. . .
* The spouse you have is just fine—except they are too heavy, too loud, don’t do enough of this and too much of that, don’t have a lot of money, don’t have. . .

-That cycle becomes deadly for us to try to live in. Yet our society runs on this sort of concept that always has to make us feel as if we are missing out on life if we don’t have the latest and the greatest.

* You *need* a new widget!
* You *need* a new doodad!
* You *need* a new gizmo!

-It is difficult to live in this kind of gripping discontent when our society cannot understand the difference between wants and needs. The devil will take advantage of us if we are not careful in our pursuits of so-called happiness.

-Discontentment is the “If Only” disease:

If only I had more money.

If only I could make better grades.

If only we owned a nicer home.

If only we hadn’t made that bad investment.

If only I hadn’t come from such a bad background.

If only she would have stayed married to me.

If only our pastor were a stronger preacher.

If only my child were able to walk.

If only we could have children.

If only we didn’t have children.

If only the business could have succeeded.

If only my husband hadn’t died so young.

If only I would’ve said “No” to drugs.

If only they had given me a break.

If only I hadn’t had that accident.

If only we could get back on our feet.

If only he would ask me out.

If only people would accept me as I am.

If only my folks hadn’t divorced.

If only I had more friends.

If only. . .

-That kind of mentality will destroy you both physically and spiritually.

1. **On Discontentment**

**Thomas Watson**—Discontent is a fretting humor which dries the brain, wastes the spirit, and corrodes and eats out the comfort of life. Discontent makes a man so that he does not enjoy what he possesses. A drop or two of vinegar will sour a whole glass of wine. Let a man have the affluence and confluence of worldly comforts, yet a drop or two of discontent will embitter and poison all.

**J. F. Clarke**—The root of all discontent is self-love.

**Benjamin Franklin**—The more self is indulged the more it demands, and, therefore, of all men the selfish are the most discontented.

**Feltham**—Discontent is like ink poured into water, which fills the whole fountain full of blackness. It casts a cloud over the mind, and renders it more occupied about the evil which disquiets than about the means of removing it.

-Discontentment will take you to places that you would never want to go to.

A little Swiss watch had been made with the smallest parts and great skill. Yet it was dissatisfied with its restricted sphere of influence on a lady’s wrist. It envied the position of the great tower clock on the city hall. One day as it passed with its owner by the city hall, the tiny watch exclaimed, “I wish I could go way up there! I could then serve many instead of just one.” Now it so happened that its owner was in a position with the city that gave her access to tower clock, so she said, “You shall have your opportunity, little watch.”

The next day, a slender thread was let down from the tower and the little watch was tied to it. Slowly and carefully, the watch was pulled up the side of the tower, rising higher and higher each moment. Of course, when it reached the top, it was completely lost to view. In this dramatic way, the watch learned that its elevation had effected its annihilation! (From *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, Michael Green, p. 80.)

-There is a powerful lesson in that little illustration that should cause us to understand that God has most of us exactly where He wants us to be. The great soul-gratifying experience of growing where you are planted has to capture us or discontentment will sink us.

1. **The Consequences of Discontentment**

-The Bible is loaded with illustrations of men who lived out their lives in the darkness of discontentment compared to others who lived in a state of blessed contentment.

* Nero was growling on the Roman throne while Paul was writing encouragement from the prison.
* Ahab was pouting and depressed on his bed at nap time and Naboth was content in his vineyard.
* Haman literally fretted himself to a hanging death because a man would not tip his hat to him.
* Ahithophel, one of the greatest lawyers in the Bible, hung himself because of his fear of dying.

-Discontentment has its consequences in every portion of life and we are warned not to buy into the myth of greener grass on the other side of the fence.

-There are consequences of discontentment:

* Discontentment leads to prayerlessness.
* Discontentment leads to double-mindedness.
* Discontentment leads to blame.
* Discontentment leads to a soul-hunger that destroys.
* Discontentment leads to anger.
* Discontentment leads to depression.
* Discontentment leads to self-centeredness.
* Discontentment leads to self-pity.

-There has to be certain vigilance in our lives against this deadly trap of the devil. But we read from our text that it is something that has to be learned. This means there will be classrooms of life that will stretch and challenge us in what God wants us to be.

1. **THE APOSTLE PAUL**

-If ever there were a man to live who had the soul the size of a mountain, it would be the Apostle Paul. But the apostle spent forty years in school before he could write this passage under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

-We should not be discouraged about pursuing this character quality of contentment in the Christian life. If won’t come to us in just a matter of two or three prayer sessions, or two or three weeks of reading the Bible, or two or three months of coming to church, it will come to us as we enter the schools that the Lord registers us in.

-Paul was certainly an example of a man who had endured many things to get to this point in his walk with the Lord.

-There are some key words that give us an indication of what kind of content that Paul was subjected to in the classroom of Christ.

1. **The Low Lands—Abased, Hungry, Suffering**

-Paul knew the experiences of the low lands. He knew how to be abased, to be hungry, and what it was like to suffer. One trip to prison took care of that and he went to prison more than once. He understood what it was like to endure the stigma that came with the status of being a felon.

* Consider being locked up in prison with your back beaten.
* Not only bloody but bruised.
* Imagine being thrown to the ground in the prison and the dirt coming in contact with that open raw wound.
* When the dirt was introduced, teeming masses of germs crept in and within a few hours, Paul was delirious with fever.
* No aspirin or acetaminophen to reduce the fever. Nothing offered for his pain.
* Tack on the pitiful amounts of stale, dirty bread.
* Consider the rancid water that was passed to him in a clay cup.

-That was the school that Paul went to so he could learn contentment. Literally having the life beat out of you to the point you are physically incapacitated was where Paul learned his deep contentment with life.

-But there are other tenets of dark experiences that Paul had to endure.

* He knew the forsaking of Demas.
* He knew the hateful opposition of an Alexander.
* He knew the bitter persecution at the hands of Hymenaeus.
* He knew what it was like to be in the middle of church conflict in Corinth.
* He knew what the blows to his reputation had been like from the elders in Galatia.

-On and on the list could go but it was through all of this that Jesus Christ was teaching him contentment.

-What can you do with a man like that? He is not a victim of his circumstances but he literally is the master of them. Through all of that he could be exalted without a trace of pride and he could be knocked down and never have a hint of despair that choked him.

An elderly preacher was asked one time by a much younger minister how he had passed through so many dark trials and no one had ever heard him complain. In fact, he always seemed to be cheerful and content throughout his troubles. The elderly preacher told the young man that it had to do with making the right use of his eyes.

The young minister was confused and asked him to elaborate on what he meant by that. The old elder said that when he met any trial the he would remember heaven and think to himself that his goal in life was to get there. He then would look at where he was standing how small of a place he would need when he died. The last thing he would do was look around his world and see how many other people had it worse than what he did. It was through doing that when he learned to be content in whatever state he was in.

**B. The High Lands—Abounding and Filled**

-Paul also knew what it was like to live in the highlands of spiritual power.

* He knew the height of revelation from the third heaven.
* He had been exposed to the joy of successful missionary journeys.
* He knew the blessings that came from the brotherhood.
* He knew the experience of vast numbers of harvest in Ephesus.

-Paul was no stranger to success. We find very few lessons, if any on how to abound. More saints and more preachers experience failure during their days of “abounding” than ever during the duress of being “abased.”

-Paul knew what it was like to experience the high hopes of spiritual planes and that was a great temptation to failure, so the classroom of contentment marked him with a thorn.

-Our world mostly believes that it is very hard to get rich but a very easy thing to be rich. There are many hidden dangers in the deep waters of success.

**Thomas Manton**—A garment which is too long trails in the mire and soon becomes a dirty rag; and it is easy for large estates to become much the same. It is a hard lesson to ‘learn to abound’ (Php. 4:12). We say such a one would do well to be a lord or a lady; but it is a harder thing than we think it to be.

1. **The Goal of the Lowlands and Highlands**

-The goal that contentment desires to produce in us is multiple but I want to briefly mention just three.

* Faith that soundly believes in God and the promises only He can bring to us whether little or much that comes in way of blessing.
* Humility of the heart that neither rises nor falls with our successes or our failures but is always even keeled.
* A weaning from the world so that we are not distracted with the lower affairs of this world but with the things of God.

-These are the things that we ought to pursue in our lives of worship.

1. **CONCLUSION—GODLINESS WITH CONTENTMENT. . . GREAT GAIN**

-Look around your life, there are blessings that come from every direction.

* The job you have sustains you in ways that you don’t realize.
* The family you are a part of adds responsibility that makes you who you are.
* The church you attend creates godly accountability that keeps many of us from straying into the depths of sin.
* The limited resources you work with every week creates wisdom in you that will bless you in later years.
* The rough path you are on causes you to reach up and take the hand of God.
* The wild success that you lament that you do not have has spared you from more deadly temptations than you will ever understand.
* The troubles you may hate are what cause you to keep pressing on for the hope that lies before us!

-Gratitude is not only a gift but it has to become a mindset.

There is a fable told about a king’s garden in which the trees and all the flowers began to talk among themselves and little did they realize that the king could hear them. The oak was sad because he could not bear flowers. The rosebush was mad because she did not bear fruit. The vine asked, “What good can I do?” The king noticed a little marigold that had a glad, fresh face among the gloom of all the others. So the king asked, “What makes you so glad when all the rest pine away and complain?” “I thought,” said the little marigold, “that you wanted me here because you planted me, and so I made up my mind to be the best little marigold that could be!” We all ought to take lessons from that and do the very best we can with where God has placed us.

**1 Timothy 6:6-8 KJV** But godliness with contentment is great gain. **[7]** For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out. **[8]** And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

**Hebrews 13:5-6 KJV** *Let your* conversation *be* without covetousness; *and be* content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. **[6]** So that we may boldly say, The Lord *is* my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.