

# Godliness with Contentment

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I pray that the Holy Ghost will help us receive what we need this morning—that both *your* prayers and *mine* will be answered. I want to begin by sharing a little story I first read many years ago:

*Two little children were put early to bed on a winter's night, for the fire had gone out, and the cold was pouring in at the many cracks of their frail shanty.*

*The mother strove to eke out the scantiness of the bed-covering by placing clean boards over the children. A pair of bright eyes shone out from under a board, and just before it was hushed in slumber, a sweet voice said, "Mother, how nice this is! How I pity the poor people who don't have any boards to cover their children with this cold night."*

I suppose one reason this story struck me so deeply is because I want to be more like that: content, aware of my blessings. I can hear myself complaining: "Mom! Charlotte's board is bigger than mine!" Or "Hey! I'm going to get slivers!" This little girl was able to look at everything from the perspective of what she *had*—not what she *didn't have*. And she was concerned about those who didn't have as much as she did rather than upset

and crabby because some had so much more than she did. She probably knew that some people had electric blankets or buffalo robes or quilts or heated bricks to keep them warm—but still she was content with what she had.

Why is it so hard for me to be that way? Is it ever hard for you? I spend too much time thinking and worrying about what I *don't* have instead of being grateful and content with what I *do* have.

I remember seeing an organizational chart once that had someone listed as a "content specialist." I know it meant "content," but wouldn't it be great if some of us could volunteer to serve as "content specialists"? We could organize a "Content Club," and the little girl with clean boards could be our club president (or "chairman of the board")!

In the New Testament there is a letter from the apostle Paul to his beloved young disciple Timothy about contentment. I encourage you

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to read all of 1 Timothy, chapter 6, because I don't have time to do that this morning. Here are just a few verses:

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

The phrase in verse 6 is the title of my message today: Godliness with Contentment. One definition of contentment I especially like is “tranquil happiness.” I want to explore some of the ways in which godliness and contentment go together.

As Moroni was finishing the Book of Mormon, he extended a powerful invitation in our quest for godliness: “Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness” (Moroni 10:32). I'm sure you do the same thing I do—you examine yourself. Perhaps you, like I, find that some aspects of your life and your soul are not yet as godly as you would like. Are there some things in your life, as there are in mine, that don't seem to bring increased contentment, peace, enjoyment, and happiness?

President David O. McKay often quoted William George Jordan:

*Happiness consists not of having, but of being; not of possessing, but of enjoying. It is the warm glow of a heart at peace with itself.* [“The Royal Road to Happiness,” *The Majesty of Calmness* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1900), p. 54; see David O. McKay, *CR*, October 1955, p. 8]

Happiness is a state of being contented or satisfied. But sometimes it's hard to be content and satisfied—to have enough. There will always be a newer watch, a more powerful computer, a fancier car or closet organizer. But you can never get enough of what you don't need,

because what you don't need never satisfies. We spend money we don't have to buy things we don't need to impress people we don't like who don't come over and get impressed anyway.

President McKay further said that

*to seek happiness or even contentment in the acquisition of . . . worldly things alone is to lose sight of the higher purpose of life. And that is one reason why there is discouragement and why there is despair generally in the world.* [*CR*, October 1934, p. 93]

Before we set our hearts too much on anything, maybe we ought to carefully observe how happy those people are who seem to have everything. We may neglect to thank our Heavenly Father for five pennies if we're constantly complaining because we don't have ten—and they *all* belong to him anyway!

William S. Ogden said that “happiness cannot be bought; indeed, money has very little to do with it.” Much of our happiness might be overlooked because *it doesn't cost anything*. What if all of a sudden we found out that sunrises and sunsets had been made pay-per-view? I saw a bumper sticker that said, “Good news: Sunsets are free.” Someone has said that it's good to have money and the things that money can buy—but it's good, too, to check up once in a while and make sure we haven't lost the things that money *can't* buy.

I think of how many times I've heard both my parents, who grew up in humble circumstances, say, “We didn't know we were poor.” My father speaks of the Christmas when they had an orange to share among the brothers and sisters and how happy they were. Now my dad is ninety-three and doesn't hear or walk as well as he used to, and my mother has had a couple of strokes that have affected her speech and slowed her down a little. And they are two of the most content and happy people I know.

They frequently say, “We have all we need.”  
I want to follow their example!

I like something George Albert Smith said  
about what he learned as a little boy:

*I was impressed with the idea that our Heavenly Father loves us and that his commandments were not intended to deprive us of true pleasure, [but rather,] if observed, would add to our peace and contentment here and prepare us for eternal happiness. [Sharing the Gospel with Others (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1948), p. 50]*

Contentment comes from *within* much more  
than it comes from without.

When I first saw the movie *The Miracle Worker* many years ago, I became so interested in the life of Helen Keller. If ever anyone had reason to complain, I thought, it was Helen. For all but a few months of her life she had no sight and no hearing. And yet as I’ve studied her life I’ve found that she was one of the happiest, busiest, most influential women who ever lived.

And here are just three of the many things she shared that have helped me understand contentment and gratitude better:

*Your success and happiness lie in you. External conditions are the accidents of life, its outer trappings. [The Faith of Helen Keller, ed. Jack Belck (Kansas City, Missouri: Hallmark Editions, 1967), p. 25]*

*Keep your face to the sunshine and you cannot see the shadow. [p. 42]*

*When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us. [p. 24]*

I have come to feel that no material success and no amount of possessions or pleasures can

make us happy and peaceful if we’re not  
happy and peaceful inside.

Brigham Young said:

*Thrust a man into prison and bind him with chains, and then let him be filled with the comfort and with the glory of eternity, and that prison is a palace to him. Again, let a man be seated upon a throne with power and dominion in this world, ruling his millions and millions, and without that peace which flows from the Lord of Hosts—without that contentment and joy that comes from heaven, his palace is a prison. [JD 5:1–2]*

George Albert Smith said:

*Now I do not care how much wealth you pour into the laps of men, unless there is in their bosoms the Spirit of God they are unhappy. . . . It is so with all of us; unless we have the spirit of contentment in our hearts we are miserable. . . . If a man has all the wealth in creation, and has heaped upon him all the honours and powers that the world can give, his soul is discontented and miserable, unless he possesses the Spirit of Christ. [JD 9:349]*

Wanting less is probably a better blessing than having more. It’s a change in the desires of our heart, and we can thereby be content sooner and more often. Listen to the apostle Paul’s comments from the book of Philippians:

*For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*

*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. [Philippians 4:11–12]*

Paul speaks of being both full and hungry and yet seems to have found a way to be content no matter what state he is in because of his closeness to Jesus and the joy he found in doing the Savior’s work.

While serving as a missionary, I thought many times of Alma's yearning and have desired the same thing he did:

*O that I were an angel, and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people!*

*Yea, I would declare unto every soul, as with the voice of thunder, repentance and the plan of redemption, that they should repent and come unto our God, that there might not be more sorrow upon all the face of the earth.*

And then I remembered what he learned and how he expressed it:

*But behold, I am a man, and do sin in my wish; for I ought to be content with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto me. . . .*

*. . . Why should I desire more than to perform the work to which I have been called? [Alma 29:1–3,6]*

What has God asked of you at this point in your life? Are you finding joy and contentment in being a child of God, a home teacher, a friend, an aunt, a brother, a neighbor, a member of Relief Society, a Good Samaritan? I'm convinced that our Heavenly Father will never ask us to do anything that doesn't matter. Each calling, each chance to serve, is part of the whole effort of building his kingdom and helping his children return home.

In 1 Corinthians, chapter 12, we are taught a great lesson about the importance of each of us doing our part well, no matter what that part might be. You're familiar with this. Paul teaches:

*For the body is not one member, but many.  
If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?*

*And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?*

*If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? . . .*

*And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. [1 Corinthians 12:14–17, 21]*

Eyes need hands, and heads need feet. We all need each other very, very much. So if you're a hand, be a *good* hand, reaching out to others! If you're an eye, be an eye single to God's glory—to doing what's right! Be an ear willing to hear and feel the whisperings of God's Holy Spirit! Be a fantastic foot. Be a wise head. Be a happy heart!

One day while on a mission in Scotland, David O. McKay was walking around Stirling Castle with his companion, Peter G. Johnson. He said it was at the beginning of his mission, and on that day he had been snubbed while tracting. He was discouraged and homesick. He noticed a building that was half-finished. There was an inscription above the front door, carved in stone, that became a motto for his life: "What E'er Thou Art, Act Well Thy Part" (see CR, October 1954, p. 83).

And so let us find godliness and contentment in what we have and who and where we are at this time in our eternity. Let us add our part the best we can. Some say it this way: Bloom where you are planted. Don't be complacent as a noxious weed or poison oak—and don't be discontent because you're not the biggest rose in the valley. Bloom! Be pretty!

From Aesop comes this truth: "Be content with your lot—one cannot be first in everything." Not everyone can be the star of the play, the captain of the ship, the soloist with the symphony, the president of the company, the quarterback (and not everyone wants to be)—and without the cast, the crew, the orchestra, the staff, the team, not much would

happen. It's a great feeling when we can find both a thrill and a sense of contentment when others are successful.

There is a verse from the Lord's Prayer that has taught me a good lesson about being content with what I have: "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). Enough for today. And Psalm 23 also invites me to experience contentment:

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.*

*He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*

*Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.*

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*

How thankful I am that Jesus is our Good Shepherd.

I've always been moved and instructed by the stories of the pioneers, who had very few possessions and yet had such comments as these:

*Our health and our lives were preserved—we outlived the trying scenes—we felt contented and happy—the songs of Zion resounded from wagon to wagon—from tent to tent; the sound reverberated through the woods, and its echo was returned from the distant hills; peace, harmony, and contentment reigned in the habitations of the saints. . . .*

*It is true that in our sojourning we do not possess all the luxuries and delicacies of . . . established countries and cities, but we have an abundance of the staple commodities. . . . We feel contented and happy in the wilderness. [B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus**

*Christ of Latter-day Saints*, vol. 3 (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1930), p. 49]

Elder Adam S. Bennion remarked that:

*As you read the history of the pioneers, it becomes increasingly clear with every page that you read, that they endured adversity and hardship. They could stand persecution; they could bear up under abuse; they could recover from the infliction of all kinds of harmful hatreds. That record is clear. The question before our generation is: Can we and our children endure prosperity and ease?*

*I have not the time . . . to compare the two struggles. I sometimes wonder which is the harder. [CR, April 1954, p. 97; emphasis in original]*

Perhaps one of our great challenges today is to find contentment and godliness amidst our abundance, remembering Jacob's caution in the Book of Mormon:

*But wo unto the rich, who are rich as to the things of the world. For because they are rich they despise the poor, and they persecute the meek, and their hearts are upon their treasures; wherefore, their treasure is their god. And behold, their treasure shall perish with them also. . . .*

*Wherefore, do not spend money for that which is of no worth, nor your labor for that which cannot satisfy. Hearken diligently unto me, and remember the words which I have spoken; and come unto the Holy One of Israel, and feast upon that which perisheth not, neither can be corrupted, and let your soul delight in fatness. [2 Nephi 9:30,51]*

I have seen so much godliness with contentment in little homes made of bamboo and sticks, of mud and clay, of cardboard and tin. And I've experienced it, too, in palaces with running water and electricity and a way to make the home warm in the winter and cool in the summer. No one, no matter where they live, no matter how little or how much they

have, can experience more genuine happiness, more godly contentment, and more peace of heart than those who are closest to their Heavenly Father—who know that he lives, that Jesus Christ died for everyone and for them personally.

I've had some concerns that I might be misunderstood this morning—that someone might hear “godliness with complacency” instead of “godliness with contentment.” I would like to compare the two, perhaps narrowing the definitions more than I should. Much of the talk thus far is about contentment. Now I want to share just a few things about complacency.

President Ezra Taft Benson said: “We do not like to be disturbed as we enjoy our comfortable complacency” (*An Enemy Hath Done This* [Salt Lake City: Parliament Publishers, 1969], p. 90). Here is where complacency is so much different for me than godliness with contentment—we *are* disturbed! We cannot be complacent because we are striving to deny ourselves of all ungodliness!

President Hugh B. Brown put it this way:

*Complacency is a very grave danger in the Church as well as in the world. We need to be aroused to the fact that there is much yet to do in this matter of gaining our salvation. . . . We need to study more, to think more, to pray more fervently. . . .*

*Some have thought that upon joining the Church and being faithful all trials would end, all difficulties disappear, and all temptations cease. [Not so you'd notice!] [The Abundant Life (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965), p. 169]*

Nephi warned against complacency, reminding us of one of the devil's tactics:

*And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell. [2 Nephi 28:21]*

President Benson commented on this once, saying that Satan was still alert and that “he is probably using the method of encouraging complacency. He is probably making an effort to lull us away into a false security because things seem well in Zion” (*CR*, April 1955, p. 47). Contentment is *not* complacency, and it's not apathy, particularly not when it's used in Paul's phrase the way it is: “But godliness with contentment is great gain.”

In a letter to the editor of *BYU Studies*, Stanley B. Kimball suggested that “perhaps if the number *seven* had not held such mystic significance to earlier minds there would have been eight deadly sins—the eighth being that of complacency.” He said it conditions us to “demand and expect little” (“Mormon Culture: A Letter to the Editor,” *BYU Studies* 5, no. 2 [Winter 1964]: 127; emphasis in original). So I'm not in any way advocating complacency or apathy or doing nothing. We must *row*, not *drift*. I'm not speaking of *coast on* but of *carry on!*

The summers I was sixteen and seventeen I worked at Zion National Park. That was quite a few years ago. Lewis and Clark hadn't been gone that long. I used to like to say to the park rangers, “Zion prospereth—all is well.” I earned something like thirty-three cents an hour plus room and board, and when I finished cleaning cabins I could hike and explore *to my heart's content* (interesting phrase).

As groups of visitors would prepare to leave on the bus, we'd gather around in our lovely uniforms and perform something we called “Singaway.” Among the songs we sang was one that goes: “Pack up your troubles in your old kit-bag, And smile, smile, smile” (George Asaf [George H. Powell], 1915).

Studies have shown that people who are content smile more. Can a smile be as contagious as a yawn? I think so! I've been experimenting with both. I wonder what a difference it would make in here—in our hearts (and in

here, in this big room)—if we smiled more often. Like even just a couple of more times a day. Could we do that? It's such a little thing, really—and yet it can make a difference for us and others. Just two or three more times each day. How about it? Why not?

Could we say more often things like “Hello,” “Thank you,” “I'm sorry,” “Can I help?” “Are you OK?” The power is in *here* (in this big room), and the power is in *here* (in my heart) to make the world a better place. Double your smiles today. Do good and be good. A living prophet has asked that we try a little harder to be a little better—that's do-able!

I'm suggesting that we seek to experience contentment while we work toward godliness—that we remember and appreciate all that God and Christ have done for us. Look inward—at what you have, and at what you need. You will find God waiting to bless you. He keeps *all* his promises. I'm convinced he wants to bless us with comfort and peace and joy and contentment. He wants to visit us in our sorrow and join us in our happiness. Let him do that for you during this Thanksgiving season, will you?

I am further convinced that contentment leads to gratitude and thanksgiving more than any amount of money or possessions. Try this before Christmas—before Thanksgiving if you have time: Go outside where you live or work and “look in.” Look in at you. (Let people think what they will.) Consider all the blessings with which God has surrounded you in abundance. “Count your many blessings; name them one by one, And it will surprise you what the Lord has done” (“Count Your Blessings,” *Hymns*, 1985, no. 241). It will surprise you over and over and over again. Can you think of one blessing that you haven't thanked him for specifically in a long, long time?

I want to share a few of the things that recently I have named one by one: the Savior, my parents and my family, the gospel, water, the scriptures and the ability to read, temples,

neighbors and friends, light and truth, prayer, music, the great plan of happiness, hope, the Missionary Training Center, opportunities, rain, Relief Society, agency, the Atonement, my Mom's chocolates, the still small voice, and a complete lack of boredom in my life.

Could we add just one minute of thanks to each prayer we offer? Just *one minute*? God gives us the gift of 1440 minutes every single day. Have we used any of those minutes on this beautiful day to say “Thank you” to him? Has it been a while since you've offered a prayer with only expressions of gratitude? Has it been a while since you've fasted to express thanks to Heavenly Father? Has it been a while since you felt *happy* and *content* through and through? I hope you can feel that way today and during the coming days of Thanksgiving and Christmas.

In the book of Alma, Amulek invites us to “live in thanksgiving daily, for the many mercies and blessings which [God] doth bestow upon you” (Alma 34:38). God seems to continually give me what I have not yet earned.

David O. McKay said that the gospel of Jesus Christ “invites the world to peace, to rest, to contentment” (*GI*, p. 111). But not necessarily to an absence of sorrow and challenges. Contentment doesn't come only when the lights are always green, the parking places right in front, the lines short and fast. It doesn't come only because the car will always start or the furnace will always work or the baby will always sleep through the night. Contentment is here—inside of us.

Was Jesus ever content? When he was with the people in the new world he said that his joy was full (see 3 Nephi 17:20). And yet he suffered so much and was treated with such cruelty—for us, for you and for me, in a very personal way. He could have stopped it. At any moment he or his Father could have stopped what was happening. They could have stopped it when he went into the Garden of Gethsemane and experienced agony he

neither deserved nor perhaps fully expected. At one point he asked his Father if the cup might be taken from him. But then he continued doing his Father's will.

He could have stopped it when they were spitting on him and mocking him. He could have stopped it when they started to drive nails into his hands and feet. At any moment he could have stopped it. But he didn't—oh, thank goodness he didn't. He and our Father carried out the great plan that was meant to save and rescue us.

And he who could have had great revenge asked his Father to forgive those who tortured and crucified him because they didn't know what they were doing. Can *we* do that, too? Can *we* let go of our anger, our bitterness, our desire for "getting even"? Can *we* forgive others because they don't know what they're doing?

Let us be thankful that God never gives up on us, never deserts nor ignores us—and so let *us*, in a godlike and Christlike way, never give

up on one another. Don't cast people out of your synagogue, and don't cast them out of your heart.

Let us be thankful that it is still today—that we can still make some changes, make some visits, make some friends, make some peace, find contentment.

O that I were an angel and had the ability to express to you beautifully and adequately how much this means to me—how much I need and appreciate God's love for us and the incredible gift of his Beloved Son so that we can go home again. They have blessed me far beyond my ability to "count" and "name."

*The Lord bless thee, and keep thee:*

*The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:*

*The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.* [Numbers 6:24–26]

I say this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.