

Practically applying the character quality of

Contentment

vs. Covetousness

"Realizing that true happiness does not depend on material conditions."

By: Stephen Leckenby

A Matter of Control

This month's **CHARACTER FIRST!**® Bulletin on Contentment opens with some valuable insight:

"Contentment is a cousin of self-control. Self-control is restraining myself from what is available but not wise. Contentment is restraining myself from desiring what is not available.

Sadly the individual who chases fulfillment is usually the hardest-pressed to find it. The person who finds fulfillment where he is today experiences the greatest kind of wealth."

So often, we find ourselves with the mindset that fulfillment comes from entertainment and "the next big thing." We live our life one thrill to the next. Our day to day routine mirrors the job description of a pilot as it was defined by an observer: Hours of complete boredom punctuated by moments of stark terror. Contentment then becomes based on the current level of excitement. This perspective can get us into big trouble.

Excitement vs. Happiness

The drug of excitement is becoming more and more popular in our society. Researches have determined that an adrenaline rush can actually be addictive. Pop culture continues to capitalize on this with TV shows like "Fear Factor" and "Greatest Police Chase Videos." Amusement parks continue to come up with rides that

take us higher and faster. And, as we have seen demonstrated, if you have enough money, you can even rent-a-ride into space. Our "boring jobs and home lives" pale in comparison to these things. No wonder we are seeing so many career changes and broken families. We just can't seem to sit still and enjoy what we have.

"True contentment is a thing as active as agriculture. It is the power of getting out of any situation all that there is in it. It is arduous and it is rare."

G.K. Chesterton

Now, I'm not trying to blame our lack of contentment on pop culture. Each one of us has to make a choice to be content. When we focus on things that bring true happiness, we can find that contentment. Happiness is based on enjoying the things that are in our lives RIGHT NOW. I am not suggesting that we should be jumping for joy in painful situations or economic hardship. Rather, it is the principle that change does not automatically bring happiness. As they say, "The grass ain't always greener...."

Greener Grass

Let's talk about the greener-grass syndrome for a second. If we look around us at the people in powerful positions or those of great wealth, do they appear more content? Look at the lives of those who appear to have it all, whether they are athletes, movie stars, musicians, etc, and you will find discontent that has lead to substance abuse and broken relationships. Different or new has definitely not turned out to be better or to bring true happiness. The grass was greener on the other side, but once they got there, the side they came from became the greener other side.

On the flip side, think of people you know who have very little and yet appear to be very happy. Have you ever found yourself wishing you had what they did? As John Greenleaf Whittier said,

*"No longer forward nor behind,
I look in hope or fear;
But, grateful, take the good I find,
The best of now and here."*

CHARACTER FIRST!® Bulletin Series

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