

CONTENTMENT

Did your family receive as many mail order catalogs as we did during the holiday season? I've often wondered how big the pile would be if we saved a year's worth of those catalogs! I read of one household that received nine pounds of catalogs in one day! If you include the daily newspaper sales inserts, the influx of enticing advertisements can be overwhelming.

Contentment is hard to achieve at any time, but is particularly difficult during holiday seasons. The Bible speaks to this in Ecclesiastes 4:4. I especially like the Good News translation of that verse, "*I have also learned why people work so hard to succeed; it is because they envy the things their neighbors have. But it is useless. It is like chasing the wind.*"

Synonyms for discontent include: dissatisfaction, unhappiness, restlessness, and disgruntlement. A simpler way to put it: **always wanting more**. One thing we've noticed as we've had the opportunity to visit other parts of the world is that we Americans seem more discontent than people from other cultures, and we live in the most prosperous country in the world!

God's Word contains warnings of how *always wanting more* causes serious problems in our lives. "*Do not wear yourself out trying to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint*" (Proverbs 23:4 NIV). Often we overwork just to get more. The Bible says that causes **fatigue**. Wanting more can also cause **debt**. "*The more you have, the more you spend*" (Ecclesiastes 5:11 LB). It's the old "keeping up with the Jones" mentality. And about the time you catch up with them, they get more!

Discontentment also causes us to **worry**. "*Workers may or may not have enough to eat, but at least they can get a good night's sleep. The rich man, however, has so much he stays awake worrying*" (Ecclesiastes 5:12 GN). Fatigue, debt, and worry are a lethal combination that often leads to **conflict**. Many contend that the number one cause of divorce is financial tension. "*Do you know where your fights and arguments come from? They come from the selfish desires that war within you*" (James 4:1 NCV). We live under the false pretense that *things* will make us happy. And they might just do that for a while, but that temporary happiness doesn't last. We call that **dissatisfaction**. Ecclesiastes 5:10 (GN) says, "*....you'll never get all you want.*"

The Apostle Paul said, "*I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation*" (Philippians 4:12 NIV). Fortunately for us, Paul shares his secret.....

First, **be grateful for what you have**. "*If God gives a man wealth and property.....he should be grateful and enjoy what he has.....it is a gift from God*" (Ecclesiastes 5:19 GN). Be grateful - enjoy - realize all blessings are a gift from God. Someone once said, "**Happiness is not getting everything you want - happiness is enjoying what you already have.**"

Second, **be generous with what you have**. The opposite of getting is GIVING. Giving is the antidote to materialism. My guess is that as the new year wears on, most of us will more easily remember what we gave as Christmas gifts than what we received. Generosity is powerful stuff. As we start our journey into 2005, let's remember the most generous gift ever given - "**He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life**" (John 3:16).

**Ed Edwards
Living Well**