

Escaping the Discontentment Trap  
Pastor David Seabaugh  
Immanuel, Elmhurst

Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. Colossians 3:16

Discontentment is powerful. It can transform any of us into bitter, angry people, all while masquerading as something beneficial and good. I think we can all agree that the world isn't as God intended it. In fact, it's not even close. Injustice reigns, greed is rampant, moral decay is accelerating and trust in institutions has eroded. Want to complain about something? Easy pickings. We can go all day and whip ourselves into a frenzy over the sorry state of our world.

Discontentment doesn't stop there. The brokenness of our relationships and our bodies can breed discontent enough by itself. Our needs compound, whether it is physical or emotional, and whatever we have isn't enough. There is always something better or someone better that is just outside of our reach. Strangely, even when we do have enough, it doesn't feel like enough. Discontentment hangs on to our hearts and drags us into the insatiable depths of self-pity and discouragement.

It's a trap.

I know what it's like to be caught in that trap. It's not a pleasant place. This is nothing new for me. Back in high school my mother would get frustrated with my discontent and challenge me to count my blessings. Well, that was the last thing I wanted to do! I knew full well that if I counted my blessings then I would feel better. My righteous indignation made me feel powerful. To acknowledge God's blessings in my life would demonstrate just how little power I actually had, and to make it worse, would replace it with... gratitude!

Gratitude puts the power in the right place. Gratitude transforms self-entitlement into God's gracious gift. Gratitude releases us from the bitter anger of discontentment and replaces it with joy. However, gratitude doesn't make the situation change. Our lives and this world are still pretty messed up. Gratitude connects us with what God has provided, and allows us to use that for the sake of good with our confidence firmly placed in Him. "The joy of the Lord is your strength." (Nehemiah 8:10)

So do it. Count your blessings. Start with the breath you just drew into your lungs. Continue with the food you just ate. Give thanks that you know the God who gave you that air and that food as a gift. Give thanks for your relationships and your abilities, even if they're not perfect. Think back on good times from the past, things that make you smile. Think of troubles you have endured and how God brought you through it. Think of Jesus. His death and resurrection have freed you from the power of sin and have given you a new life, now and forever.

Feeling better? Good. Now it's time to get to work on that messed up world. What has God given to you that you can use to bless someone else? Don't think too big. Do you have time and a phone? Call someone and be an encouragement. Busy with a family?

Super! Be grateful for that amazing blessing and create a beautiful lasting memory together. God has given you a church. Bless someone by offering them a ride to worship this Sunday. Whatever it is, fill your heart with the joy of the Lord, and be a blessing.