

Wanting Nothing More

by Dondi Catan

An old man stared at the sea, tearful yet hopeful. He looked out over the same waters where, just a few weeks earlier, his four daughters had drowned during a transatlantic voyage. With a pen in his hand, Horatio G Spafford meditatively wrote the classic hymn, “It Is Well with My Soul.” He expressed his heart. Can we say the same thing in times of trial and hardship? Is everything well with our soul — whether we find ourselves in good or bad situations? If we have contentment, it will unlock joy that will stay even when the good times are long gone.

“If Only”

Often, what we want is control. When things don’t happen the way we wish, we complain or even demand that our situation adjust to us. We become impatient, disappointed, frustrated. We get dissatisfied with anything and everything. We think that if we can change our circumstances, then we will be content.

The truth is, when we’re always waiting for that “happy ending” to come, we will never find contentment with life. If only I was prettier...If only I had more money...If only I had a nicer car...If only he would ask me out...If only people would accept me as I am...If only I had children...If only they could understand me... The list is endless.

When these “if onlys” don’t happen, our lives fall apart and bring us resentment and self-pity. Christian author Charles Swindoll explains, “Contentment...comes from another of those simple choices, one that doesn’t allow ourselves or others to listen to our world of woes. We simply choose to create a different kind of list — a positive one — for if we don’t, people won’t stay around us very long. Discontented souls soon become lonely souls.”

Choosing Joy

Joy is a daily choice, not a future hope. Accepting what God brings, even when what happens isn’t what we expect, will bring us joy. This is what I call the “state of enough.”

One of the most contended persons that ever lived was the apostle Paul. He joyfully wrote to the Philippians:

I have learned how to get along happily whether I have much or little. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of contentment in every situation, whether it be a full stomach or hunger, plenty or want; for I can do everything God asks me to with the help of Christ who gives me the strength and power. (*Philippians 4:11-13, TLB*)

St Paul wrote this while he was under house arrest, at a time he awaited his trial and possible execution. Even while he knew that he could die any moment, he could still talk about contentment. Complaining was not in his vocabulary. Christ gave him the power to remain in the “state of enough” regardless of the situations he found himself in.

Paul shared that he “learned” how to get along happily with much or little. Contentment is, therefore, a learned discipline. It’s not an inborn quality. It is acquired through practice, the same way that St Paul mastered the virtue through the difficulties he went through. With his example is an encouragement — we, too, can learn that being satisfied with whatever situations we find ourselves in is not impossible after all.

Dondi Catan and her husband, Moses, are the Directors of Elim Missions.