

CONTENTMENT

SEEING
GOD'S
GOODNESS

31-DAY DEVOTIONALS FOR LIFE

MEGAN HILL

Those of us who continually study contentment do so because we, like many others, have not fully “learned to be content in any and every circumstance” with the apostle Paul. Armed with the sword of the Spirit—the Word of God—Megan Hill has given us a wise and beautifully written daily devotional to help us attain this important Christian virtue. Its practical insights and applications, its simplicity and depth, its conviction and comfort will make this a daily devotional that I will return to often in my ongoing struggle for the great gain of godliness with contentment.

—**William Barclay**, Senior Pastor, Sovereign Grace Presbyterian Church, Charlotte, North Carolina; Author, *The Secret of Contentment*

Our hearts are often prone to discontent. We want what others have and think that our lives would be better if only that one thing would change (and that one thing sometimes varies from week to week). Megan Hill’s new devotional helps readers to see the source of discontent and paints a picture of biblical contentment rooted in the gospel. *Contentment: Seeing God’s Goodness* helps those who are longing to shed the weight of discontent by pointing them to the soul-satisfying contentment found in Jesus Christ.

—**Christina Fox**, Counselor; Author, *A Heart Set Free* and *Designed for Joy*

While discontent can spring up like weeds in a garden, contentment is a cultivated fruit, learned through study and practice. Megan Hill’s new devotional *Contentment: Seeing God’s Goodness* overflows with wisdom, truth, and practical applications. These daily readings refocus our gaze off of ourselves (or our neighbor’s cute new coat) and onto the goodness and faithfulness of our God. It’s a needed and helpful book, and I highly recommend it.

—**Melissa Kruger**, Author, *The Envy of Eve: Finding Contentment in a Covetous World*; Women’s Ministries Coordinator, Uptown Church, Charlotte, North Carolina

Megan Hill exposes the lie that seduces so many of us, demonstrating that a change in our circumstances will *not* improve our lives. With clear, practical, biblical reflection, Hill leads us to the greener pastures of Christian contentment. But she doesn't simply tell us to "stop our complaining"; she tells us to embrace Christ, the suffering yet contented Savior. I am glad for this resource that teaches us to live his life of holy, surrendered desire.

—**Jen Pollock Michel**, Author, *Teach Us to Want and Keeping Place*

"Be content." "Pursue contentment." "Repent of discontent." We've all heard the exhortations and rebukes. We all agree with them. "But *how?*" we cry. How do we get there?

Megan Hill comes to the rescue with a practical daily devotional full of how-to's and why-to's. But, more importantly, she shows that the remedy for discontent lies ultimately not within the "how" and "why" of a daily technique but in the "who" of a daily relationship with Jesus Christ.

—**David Murray**, Professor of Old Testament and Practical Theology, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary; Author, *The Happy Christian and Christians Get Depressed Too*

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31-DAY DEVOTIONALS FOR LIFE

A Series

DEEPAK REJU

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SEEING GOD'S
GOODNESS

MEGAN HILL



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For my parents, Brad and Patsy Evans,
who taught me by exhortation and example to
believe that God always gives what is best.

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Italics within Scripture quotations indicate emphasis added.

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Hill, Megan, 1978- author.

Title: Contentment : seeing God's goodness / Megan Hill.

Description: Phillipsburg : P&R Publishing, 2018. | Series: 31-day devotionals for life | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018028216 | ISBN 9781629954882 (pbk.) | ISBN 9781629954899 (epub) | ISBN 9781629954905 (mobi)

Subjects: LCSH: Contentment--Religious aspects--Christianity. | Devotional exercises.

Classification: LCC BV4647.C7 H55 2018 | DDC 242--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018028216>

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Tips for Reading This Devotional

EARLY IN OUR MARRIAGE, my wife and I lived on the top floor of a town house, in a small one-bedroom apartment. Whenever it rained, leaks in the roof would drip through the ceiling and onto our floors. I remember placing buckets in different parts of the apartment and watching the water slowly drip, one drop at a time. I put large buckets out and thought, *It'll take a while to fill them.* The water built up over time, and often I was surprised at how quickly those buckets filled up, overflowing if I didn't pay close enough attention.

This devotional is just like rain filling up a bucket. It's slow, and it builds over time. Just a few verses every day. Drip. Drip. Drip. Just a few drops of Scripture daily to satiate your parched soul.

We start with Scripture. God's Word is powerful. In fact, it's the most powerful force in the entire universe.¹ It turns the hearts of kings, brings comfort to the lowly, and gives spiritual sight to the blind. It transforms lives and turns them upside down. We know that the Bible is God's very own words, so we read and study it to know God himself.

Our study of Scripture is practical. Theology should change how we live. It's crucial to connect the Word with your struggles. Often, as you read this devotional, you'll see the word *you* because Megan speaks directly to you, the reader. Each reading contains reflection questions and a practical suggestion. You'll get much more from this experience if you answer the questions and do the practical exercises. Don't skip them. Do them for the sake of your own soul.

Our study of Scripture is worshipful. Fundamentally, any struggle with contentment and ingratitude is a worship problem. We've lost our orientation toward the One who should rule our lives, and we need to turn back to him. The Word points us to Christ, who rescues us from our plight and reorients our life. The goal of your time in God's Word should always be worship. As you grow in your affections for Christ, the King, you put to death your disordered desires and ungrateful attitudes. The power of a greater affection for Christ can transform your soul. You'll grow in your contentment and gratitude as you fix your eyes on the cross. Adore Christ. Love him. Cherish him. Praise him. Honor him. Give your whole life to him. Don't hold anything back.

If you find this devotional helpful (and I trust that you will!), reread it in different seasons of your life. Work through it this coming month, and then come back to it a year from now, to remind yourself how to fight for contentment.

This devotional is *not* meant to be a comprehensive guide to contentment. Good volumes are already written for that purpose. Buy them and make good use of them. You'll see several resources listed at the end of the book.

That's enough for now. Let's begin.

Deepak Reju

Introduction

DISCONTENT CAN STRIKE at any time. On a Monday morning, the alarm goes off, and discontent is ready to pounce. Anything can invite an attack—a careless slosh from your coffee mug, a terse text from your spouse, a towering mountain of laundry on the basement floor—and you are frustrated with your life before you even walk out the door. By the time the doctor's office calls with your test results or the mail delivery brings a new round of bills, you are wishing for a new life entirely. Even something as simple as an unexpected rain shower can unleash thunderclouds in your heart. Just a few hours ago you were joyfully worshipping God in the assembly of the saints at church, and today you are thoroughly disappointed about how this same God is ordering events.

And it doesn't stop there. Throughout our days, discontent waits for all of us. Whether we are young or old, alone or in a group, relaxing or working, we face circumstances that frustrate our expectations of what life should be like.

Once it takes hold of our hearts, discontent quickly leads to other sins. Because we fundamentally distrust what God is doing in and for us, our hearts give way to worry. Every new circumstance feels surprising and potentially harmful. Everything from the flu to the presidential election brings an onslaught of uncertainty. We do not believe that God is caring for us, and we have little confidence that the events in our lives will be for our good, so our minds and hearts spin with anxiety.

Dissatisfied with our own situation, we look around at the lives of others and add the sin of envy. We covet the lives of our friends and neighbors—people who seem to have everything we want and more. We also covet the lives of strangers—the happy couple with the gorgeous HGTV home or the alumnus whose

fast-track career was lauded in the latest university publication. We lust after their accomplishments or relationships or finances, increasing our discontent with our own.

Frustrated and disappointed, we also fall into the snare of complaining. Seemingly every situation releases a sigh from our hearts. The weather is too cold. The gray hairs are too plentiful. The kids are too energetic. The pay is paltry, the hours over-long, the commute a total waste. Like the Israelites in the wilderness, we give voice to our discontent with grumbling—accusing God of mishandling our lives, and demanding that he give us what we want.

Discontent—and its evil companions—are everywhere.

But if discontent waits just around the next corner, grace does too. At every moment, in every one of life's circumstances, the Lord is ready with forgiveness (see Neh. 9:17), encouragement (see Rom. 15:5), strength (see Phil. 4:13), and love (see Rom. 8:38–39). The God who made you and sustains you is able to make grace abound to you for all things at all times (see 2 Cor. 9:8). In the fight against discontent, you are never alone.

Over the next thirty-one days, we will be studying the grace of contentment and seeking, by the help of the Holy Spirit, to rest content in God's sovereignty over the circumstances of our lives. You may want to use this devotional on your own, as a part of your daily prayer and Bible reading. But since temptation to discontent is common to all of us (see 1 Cor. 10:13), you may also want to do this study with a friend or a small group, encouraging one another to contentment in the specific areas where each person struggles.

In our quest for “a tranquil heart” (Prov. 14:30), we will meditate on what the Bible says about the dangers of discontent and the joy of contentment. Each daily reading and its application section contain Scripture; read those verses carefully. It is the Word of God that can constrain and compel us to obedience in this area. It is the Word of God that the Spirit will use to bring forth contentment in our hearts.

We will begin the month by considering the value of contentment (days 1–3). Contentment is simple, but it isn't easy. We must allow the Bible's teaching to impress on our hearts the importance and blessedness of humbly receiving all things from God's loving hand. Next we will look to Christ for our example and for help in the fight for contentment (days 4–7). Christ was the only perfectly content man, and he is our best ally as we pursue a contented heart. Then we will turn our eyes to our own circumstances and will consider how God would have us understand the events he brings into our lives (days 8–12). Of course contentment does not mean that we avoid all desire, and so we will also search the Bible to discover what desires we ought to have (days 13–18). And, having submitted our righteous desires to God, we will seek to cultivate a thankful heart—which is the antidote to grumbling (days 19–23). Finally, we will look at specific circumstances of life in which contentment seems to be difficult—areas like work, money, and relationships—and we will see how the Bible directs our hearts toward trust in God (days 24–31).

We have one clear aim. No matter what situation we find ourselves in, we want to be able to say, "I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:11–13).

*“Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet,
gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in
God’s wise and fatherly disposal in every condition.”*

Jeremiah Burroughs

THE VALUE OF
CONTENTMENT

DAY 1

Abundant Life

*A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy
makes the bones rot. (Prov. 14:30)*

I THOUGHT THAT the coat would change everything. Red canvas, with large pockets and a brown corduroy collar, this coat was just what every student in my seventh-grade class wanted. I was absolutely sure that owning this coat would lead me into a new life. When I wore it, I would be popular, beautiful, talented. With a coat like that, people would invite me to take long autumn strolls down New England country roads or to stand, smiling and radiant, in their immaculate horse barns. When I wore it, I would be a different person entirely.

I still have the coat. It hangs in the back of a closet, and I haven't worn it in the last twenty years. Needless to say, I can't recall any significant change that happened to me because of the coat. I come across it occasionally, when I am looking for the Christmas decorations or the spare sheets, and I remember how I once thought it would finally give me the life I wanted.

Setting my hope on a piece of clothing seems silly now, but over the years I have nevertheless repeatedly convinced myself that a change in my circumstances would make everything better. I've believed that getting married or having a baby or succeeding in my job or moving or mastering a new skill would be *the* way to a fulfilling life. And, every time, I have been disappointed.

In what seems like upside-down logic, the Scriptures make it clear that a better life consists not in chasing something new but in being contented with the way things are. The way to abundant life, says Proverbs, is a tranquil heart.

If you have picked up this book, it is probably because you are

interested in cultivating contentment in your heart. Perhaps you, like me, have already discovered that the perfect coat (or marriage or job or church) will not ultimately satisfy you. Perhaps you have wasted much time looking longingly over your neighbor's fence, and you sadly know the truth of today's verse: "envy makes the bones rot." Perhaps you would like to have a tranquil heart, but you don't know where to begin.

The good news for each of us is that the Lord provides everything we need for contentment. Christ came to earth, lived a life of perfect obedience, died on the cross, and was raised again so that we might be freed from envy and find satisfaction in him. Moreover, he gives us his indwelling Spirit to warn us against grumbling and to nurture contentment in our hearts as we learn from his Word. By God's grace, we can have the tranquil heart that yields abundant life. Be encouraged!

Reflect: What changes to your circumstances have you wrongly believed would bring you abundant life? What was the ultimate impact of those changes? Make a list of the ways you notice "rot" in your "bones" as a result of discontent.

Reflect: How has the Spirit helped you to fight sin and cultivate holiness in other areas of your life? How can his past faithfulness be an encouragement to you as you pursue contentment?

Act: Memorize this classic definition of contentment, or post it somewhere you will see it frequently: "Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition."¹

DAY 2

A Weightless Heart

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. (Heb. 12:1)

JOHN BUNYAN'S FAMOUS allegory, *Pilgrim's Progress*, begins with its main character, Christian, suffering under the weight of a heavy burden tied to his back. It causes him distress, slows his movements, prevents him from taking joy in the ordinary blessings of his life, and puts him in danger. His burden, of course, is sin.

After trying and failing to rid himself of his burden, Christian finds relief from it at the cross of Christ. And when it rolls away, Christian is immediately refreshed. Bunyan tells us that he was "glad and lightsome," "gave three leaps for joy," and went on his way singing.¹

The author of Hebrews likewise describes sin as a clinging weight that keeps us from joyful perseverance in the life of faith. One such burdensome sin is discontent. When we are discontent, we are in a constant state of distress, anxiety, and regret. Failing to trust God's essential goodness, we become suspicious of him and cannot enjoy him or his many blessings. We are focused on our own circumstances and do not love others well.

Thankfully, the Lord has warned us of sin's crushing weight. He has given us his Spirit to help us lay it aside (see Rom. 8:13), and he has even given us the enduring testimony of others who have experienced the power of God to free them from sin in their own lives.

One member of the cloud of witnesses is Job. At the beginning of his story, he had children, servants, and livestock in abundance (see Job 1:1–3). And yet we all know what happened—in

a single day, all these good things were taken away from Job (see vv. 13–19).

Job’s response encourages us: “And he said, ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.’ In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong” (vv. 21–22). How easy it would have been for Job to allow the sin of grumbling to weigh down his soul! But because he “feared God and turned away from evil” (v. 1), he placed the highest value on a clear conscience and a right relationship with God. Even under great affliction, Job experienced the blessing of a weightless heart.

Reflect: Discontent acts as a deadly weight, hampering our growth in righteousness and dragging us away from joy in Christ. How has discontent weakened your endurance in the Christian race?

Reflect: Read Job 1. Meditate on the fact that Job stands beside you as a witness to the Spirit’s power to strip away the burden of our sin and bring contentment to our hearts.

Act: In *Discovering The Joy of a Clear Conscience*, Christopher Ash writes, “I get a clear conscience today the same way I got a cleansed conscience at the start: by turning from known sin and trusting afresh in the blood of Jesus Christ.”² Deal with your discontent today the same way you did on the day you first believed. Then rejoice in the blessing of a weightless heart.

DAY 3

Contentment Is Great Gain

Godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. (1 Tim. 6:6–8)

ONCE EVERY YEAR, the fast food restaurant Chick-Fil-A offers a free meal to anyone who comes to the restaurant dressed as a cow. Waiting in the long line, some people appear unabashedly delighted to be bovine for a day, while others obviously feel a little silly. Not everyone finds it easy to appear in public wearing head-to-toe Holstein, yet thousands of people dress up anyway, motivated by the promise of free chicken nuggets and waffle fries. When there's something to be gained, we are usually willing to make ourselves uncomfortable.

Today's passage promises us that the often-difficult discipline of contentment will bring us "great gain" (v. 6). When we understand our own dependence on God (see v. 7) and are satisfied with his provision for our needs (see v. 8), we gain a reward more valuable than anything else we might lack. Truly, the one who pursues contentment will accumulate "treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Matt. 6:20).

In the 1600s, the Puritan Jeremiah Burroughs made a list of contentment's "excellencies."¹ As we consider a few of these God-given rewards, allow them to motivate you toward contented godliness:

1. *Contentment makes us ready to worship God.* When we worship, in private or in public, we acknowledge that God alone is God and that we are his humble creatures who

owe him our very selves. If we are contented, we will be eager to sing and pray and listen to the God who does all things well (see Job 1:20–21).

2. *Contentment allows us to experience and display God's grace.* Contentment does not come naturally to anyone. Apart from grace, all people grumble and complain almost without pause. But by his Spirit God transforms us, making us content and displaying his power to everyone who sees our lives.
3. *Contentment frees us to serve God and others.* If we are constantly preoccupied with our own situation—the things we lack or the things we wish were different—we won't be looking for opportunities to serve. The most useful people in God's kingdom are those who trust the Lord regardless of outward circumstances.
4. *Contentment keeps us from various temptations to sin.* When we are always thinking about what we would like to change in our circumstances, Satan is quick to respond. He will eagerly tempt us to sinfully demand (or take) the things that God hasn't given us (see Gen. 3:1–5; James 4:1–2). If, instead, we are satisfied with what God has given, we will not give Satan an opportunity in our hearts.

Reflect: How are you motivated by reward in your life? What hard things have you been willing to do because of promised gain?

Reflect: When have you seen these four blessings of contentment in your life and in the lives of other Christians?

Act: Pray and ask God to cultivate contentment in your heart. Ask him to give you the “great gain” he has promised.

FINDING
CONTENTMENT
BY LOOKING
TO CHRIST