

**Study Guide for The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment**  
**Pages 17-29<sup>1</sup>**

1. Do we experience contentment naturally? Do we expect to? Why is that so?
2. How does Burroughs explain the word contentment (18)
3. If God alone is self – efficient, then how can a human being be content? What alone is satisfactory for the human soul
4. The idea that we should be satisfied with God is a bit of a cliché Christian circles. What do you think it means to be satisfied and content with God? Is it a feeling? Is it an idea? If you are hungry doesn't that mean that you are not content with God?
5. On page 19, Burroughs gives a duty of the Christian. What is that duty?
6. What is the definition of contentment?
7. Where must contentment take place?
8. With respect to God, what is the difference between contentment and outward silence?
9. Do you find that you experience an immediate inward submission of your heart when faced with trying circumstances?
10. Will it take work to learn contentment?
11. On pages 21 through 22, Burroughs explains that contentment does not mean either a lack of response or a mere resignation to outward circumstances. What are the three circumstances which he lists? Why does he describe those who do not feel affliction as being in “a dangerous and almost incurable condition”?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> All page numbers are to the Banner of Truth edition.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Brooks, *The Mute Christian Under the Smarting Rod*: Aristotle speaks of fish, that though they have spears thrust into their sides, yet they awake not. God thrusts many a sharp spear through many a sinner's heart, and yet he feels nothing, he complains of nothing. These men's souls will bleed to death. Seneca reports of Senecio Cornelius, who minded his body more than his soul, and his money more than heaven; when he had all the day long waited on his dying friend, and his friend was dead,

12. To whom may we complain of our affliction? Why is this not a breach of contentment?
13. May we seek to be delivered from our afflictions?
14. Burroughs lists eight affections which are not consistent with contentment. Listen them.
15. How does murmuring contrast with complaining to God for relief?
16. Vexing and fretting would mean worrying or being anxious. What does Philippians chapter 4 say about worrying? What does Jesus say about worrying in the Sermon on the Mount? Why does Jesus say we should not worry?
17. What will be wrong with my thoughts running in a distracted and confused manner?
18. Does being distressed about my present circumstance give me an excuse to disobey God?
19. Does contentment require that I give no attention to my present circumstances? Which concern does Burroughs say must supersede all other concerns (23)?
20. If my present circumstance looks hopeless, may I worry? What reason does Burroughs give for why we should not be overwhelmed with worry when our circumstances look hopeless?
21. What causes one to be willing to send to avoid the difficulty of a circumstance? In what ways and at what times you find yourself most likely to send to alter your circumstance?
22. What is the danger noted by Burroughs for those who fall into depression (he calls this quote melancholy)?
23. What does Burroughs mean when he says that contentment is a “frame of spirit”?

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he returns to his house, sups merrily, comforts himself quickly, goes to bed cheerfully. His sorrows were ended, and the time of his mourning expired before his deceased friend was interred. Such stupidity is a curse that many a man lies under. But this stoical silence, which is but a sinful sullenness, is not the silence here meant.

24. Burroughs explains that contentment must proceed from a judgment concerning the circumstances. This means that one's emotional response to a circumstance is a judgment or conclusion about a circumstance. Therefore one's emotions can be changed, not by trying to change one's emotions; but, by changing the way one judges circumstance. Look to your own experience and identify one instance where you changed your understanding of a circumstance which resulted in a change in how you emotionally felt about a circumstance.

28. What does Burroughs mean by a "partial contentment"?

29. On page 27, Burroughs discusses the difficulty of ruling our thoughts and affections. Explain what he means by this.

30. You've likely heard the expression, "preach to yourself." That expression comes from a sermon by Martyn Lloyd-Jones on Psalm 42 and 43. In light of what you have read in Burroughs and in Psalm 42 and 43, what do you think Lloyd-Jones means as a practical matter? How would you and practice go about the work of preaching to yourself when you are in a difficult circumstance?

31. Burroughs speaks of contentment which flows from outside the contentment which comes from the inside. Explain what he means by this difference and give an example in your own life.

32. Why do you think that Burroughs states the contentment is a habit and not merely a response? Should one expect to quickly and easily formed the habit of content?

33. Is it a sin to not be content? What is the sin?

**Study Questions,  
The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment,  
pp. 31-40**

1. What are the three aspects of freely submitting to God's providence? (He writes "four" but only gives three reasons.)

2. What does he mean by, "The heart is readily brought over"?

3. What is it that causes one to freely submit (top of page 32)?

4. What is the difference between "I must submit" and "I freely submit"?

5. Note on the freedom of "a rational creature": by the phrase "a rational creature" Burroughs means a being, such as a human or an angel, that has the ability to understand

and make a free choice in a matter. By “freedom” Burroughs means the ability to make a decision based upon judgment [this is a good thing or a bad thing] about a matter and my desire to do some-thing [I desire to come close or go away from].

6. By “stupidity” Burroughs means the lack of an ability to think or feel. Thus, a stone is not content even though it never response to it circumstances.

1 Consider your own circumstances, do you find there are circumstances in which you to freely submit to God’s will? Are the circumstances in which you do not freely submit? What is the difference in the circumstances?

2 How does he explain the concept of “submitting”?

3 How does the idea of submission relate to the duty of faith?

4 If you do not submit to God’s will, then what are you doing?

5 How does one take pleasure in the providence of God?

6 Burroughs distinguishes between taking pleasure in the outcome of an affliction, and the fact of an affliction. When should one take pleasure in the affliction? What reason does Burroughs give for taking pleasure in the midst of affliction? Does this mean one enjoys the affliction itself?

7 What does he mean by this sentence on the top of 35, “The righteous man can never be made so poor, to have his house riflemen spoiled, but there will remain much treasure within.”

8 What does a contented man see in everything (top of page 36)?

9 Do you find that there are certain types of afflictions to which are willing to submit? Is a contentment to be accepting of only certain types of affliction? What does Burroughs mean by the sentence on the top of page 37, “But we must not be our own carvers.” When we determine to not be content in certain circumstances, what are we saying of and to God?

10 Is it permissible to complain of an affliction because it lasts too long?

11 Do afflictions usually come one at a time (middle page 39)?

12 On the bottom of page 39, Burroughs gives a standard to which a Christian should aspire. Do you find that that standard marks you?

13 In the last paragraph of this chapter, Burroughs explains the effect he hopes his explication has brought. Was he successful in the same? If you’ve not previously thought of contentment in this manner, should you be discouraged? What should be the effect upon learning or of how God calls us to live? What would be a sinful response?

14 As you go through this material, consider what verses you could remember and/or songs you could learn which would help you keep these thoughts close at hand. We need to learn wisdom as a preparation for trials; after the trial has begun, it is very hard to learn.

What does it mean to say “all is yours”?

“Yes! you may look down the vista of futurity, where men’s hearts fail them for fear of all that is coming on. You may even see the storm-cloud gathering thick and heavy in your horizon. You may have dreary presage of troubles, losses, sicknesses. You may shudder to have the veil lifted, that hides the things to come.

And yet, you may look into the face all the reverse and distress and death agony, that you know must sometime happen, and here is the assurance. Things to come are all yours! All your future is compassed by God's covenant of love. Every cloud is bright to you from your upper side position. No good thing shall he withhold from you. No one shall harm you. No one shall pluck you out of his hands. Angels shall camp around your dwelling, and shall bear you up in their arms, lest you dash your foot against a stone! Your track is already laid, to where it opens into the heavenly paradise. The ladder from your stony pillow has its top in glory, and has the angels traversing it meanwhile, in ministries of love to you.

And all things are yours buoys are burdens to the wreck to float it to the surface—just as the lifepreserver is a burden bound fast to a man to keep him from sinking in the sea. This darkness is but the shadow of His wing. Beyond all peradventure—far beyond all possible contingency—by His word of power and grace, who rules the universe— by his covenant and oath, who can never fail, the universe is yours! Poor sinner that you are, — deserving only of perdition,—once under the awful doom of everlasting death, having nothing to-day in your own right, but sin and shame—even you, without reserve or qualification, may look out upon the vast domain of creation, providence and redemption, and there is nothing in it all, but you can claim as your own, in Christ Jesus.

You are infinitely richer than you had thought. Up! out of your tears, and darkness, and ashes—thou child of poverty—child of sorrow. All things are yours. You are a king and a prince unto God. These doubts, this darkness, ill become one of such princely birth and of such vast possessions. Live in some manner becoming your high rank, and your estate and enjoy its splendid benefits. Walk worthily of this high vocation wherewith you are called. “For all things are yours! Paul, Apollos, Cephas, the world, life, death, things present—things to come! All are yours.” Is there any thing higher, and more assuring? “And ye are Christ's.” Can there be any thing higher, that shall link you fast to the very throne, and the very Person of the Almighty? “And Christ is God's.”

Melancthon Williams Jacobus. “The Christian's heritage.” A sermon published in 1878 on the text 1 Corinthians 3:21-23: 21 So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, 23 and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

**Study Questions,  
The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment  
pp. 41-51**

The theologian George Eldon Ladd discussed the kingdom of God in terms of “already/not yet”.<sup>3</sup> There are aspects of “the age to come” (to use the language of

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<sup>3</sup> “G. E. Ladd remarks that justification itself is eschatological, in

Hebrews 6:5) which we currently possess; and there are many things which are not yet true. We are redeemed, and yet we still must live in the world under condemnation. We are to be in, but not of, the world. We have been adopted, but our adoption is not yet complete (Romans 8:23). Even though Jeremiah Burroughs did not know Ladd's phrase, he did use the idea. We are currently in a state of anticipation.

1. Does contentment with affliction mean that I do not experience the affliction as painful? (p. 41)
2. Read Romans 5:1-5 & James 1:2-4. What is the basis for joy in the midst of trials? Does either passage state that the trial is no trial? Think of it like this: Take the word "sufferings" or "trials" and replace that with something you find enjoyable. Does it make sense to say that we rejoice in our eating fudge because eating fudge produces endurance?
3. What is the first element of the paradox or "mystery" given by Burroughs? (42)
4. In what way is a Christian always content?
5. In what way is a Christian never content?
6. What is it true that a Christian "cannot be satisfied with the enjoyment of all the world" (42).
7. Does a Christian have less or more capacity to enjoy? (42)
8. How much does a Christian need to be content in this world? (42-43).
9. What is the only thing that can "fill" a Christian? (43).
10. If you were given all things you could want, all "outward" aspects of peace, would you be content? Will a Christian be content with money, friends & peace? What would be missing?

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that the final acquittal does not take place until the Day of the Lord. But the Age to Come "has reached back into the present evil age to bring its soteric blessings to men." A Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 441-42.)" Ashland Theological Journal 22 (1990).

11. What does it mean to “have God himself”?

12. Is this true of you? In what ways do you find yourself content without God?

13. What does Peter mean that contentment requires “subtraction”? (45)

4 What is the “root of contentment”? 46.

5 Bottom of page 45: What does the Lord do to one’s heart to make it capable of contentment?

6 Top of page 46: We must subtract from what?

7 How does this process of “subtraction” differ from a merely human process of being “resigned” to whatever you have?

8 What must a Christian “add” to become content?

9 Why would one “labor to load and burden your heart with your sin”?

1 What is one’s normal procedure to feel better when in a trial (48)?

1 On page 48 he gives an example of how to rid a marriage of trouble. Explain it.

2 Do you think Burroughs’ advice for solving marriage troubles would work? Why or why not?

3 Have you ever tried such a means of resolving a conflict?

4 Does contentment come from removing the circumstance/affliction? (49)

5 What does he mean by “changing the affliction” (49)?

6 How can one get riches out of poverty?

7 How can getting what one desires be a cause for injury?

8 Have you ever received something you desired which ended up hurting

you?

9 The meaning of an event depends upon its context. For example, a young man falls ill and dies a painful death at a young age. Now say that the young man is an actor whose character falls ill and dies. The first is a tragedy; the second a delightful movie. Ask yourself, what is the “real” ultimate circumstance in which the events of your life takes place. When you feel discontent at something in your life, are you thinking of it terms of eternity or in terms of your next few weeks?

1 Read Romans 8:18-39. What is the context in which our life takes place? Pay attention to Romans 8:28 and answer, in what does everything work together for good?

## The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment

### Study Guide 4, Pages 51-60

1. What is the fifth element of contentment?
2. Burroughs contrasts two ways of thinking about a circumstance. How does a carnal heart think (this would be the automatic response of most people)? What does one who lives contentedly think?
3. Note: Naomi and Marah mean pleasant and bitter. Since God has called to a bitter rather than a pleasant place. Consider for a moment the lines of the contemporary song, Blessed Be the Name.

Blessed be Your name

When the sun's shining down on me

When the world's 'all as it should be'

Blessed be Your name

Which line of that song fights against contentment for the Christian? Contrast that with Burroughs' use of the words pleasant & bitter to describe our circumstances.

If in a bitter place I think of how I wish my circumstances would be different, is that likely to result in me being more contented? How does Burroughs direct one's thoughts (bottom page 51)?

On the top of page 51, Burroughs gives a particular title to wishing things were different: how does he describe it?

Read James 4:1-3 and then James 1:14-15. How does desiring something other than what I have lead me to sin? Now read 1:16-17. How then should we think of God's providence for our lives?

Take a bitter or difficult circumstance which presents itself to you (if there is no difficulty at present, pick a recent circumstance). What is your duty in this circumstance? How do you show love to God & neighbor in your present circumstance? If your goal is to glorify God, to obey & worship God and to do good to your neighbor, how can you still be discontent with your circumstance?

If this is true, then why do we insist on our own desires even when it leads to further discontentment?

What is the sixth element of contentment?

Whose will do I favor? How does desiring my own will lead to discontentment?

Is God's will always done? See, e.g., 1 Kings 12:15.

If I were to get my own way, would I actually be content? Read Ecclesiastes 2:1-11.

What kinds of things (categories) did Solomon obtain/enjoy? Note that the language of Solomon's wealth parallels the Garden of Eden in some ways. How did Solomon value everything that he received? Consider again contentment on the basis of getting what I desire?

Think of advertisements and popular media: what story are you constantly being told (with respect to contentment)? Think about advertisements for children's toys. Now think of the reality. What does this teach you about contentment?

A different way of thinking this through may be of help. David Powlison's essay, "I Am Motivated When I Feel Desire" explains that human life flows out of desires: We want something and so we do it. "The in working power of grace qualitatively transforms the very desires that psychologists assume are hardwired, unchangeable, morally neutral givens" (Seeing Through New Eyes, 147.) He goes on to write: "Can you change what you want? Yes. Does the answer to this question surprise you? It counters influential contemporary views of human motivation. Most Christian counseling books follow on the heels of secular psychologists and take your desires, you 'felt needs,' as givens. Many leading Christian psychologists make the unchangeability of what we long for the foundation of their systems. For example, many teach that we have an 'empty love tank' inside, and our craving for love must be met, or we are doomed to a life of sin and misery. Desires to feel good about ourselves ("self-esteem") or to accomplish something meaningful are similarly baptized. This creates the psychological equivalent of "Health and Wealth" theology, which similar selects certain common desires and accepts them as givens that God is obligated to fulfill. The psychological versions of health and wealth miss that God is about the business of changing what people actually long for." (160).

What is the seventh element of contentment?

Read (again) James 1:14-15: What causes you to be discontent?

What is the eighth element of contentment (page 56)?

When something comes to us, how should we think of it (top page 57)? Example, when we do something for a child, even if the child does not desire it (like a dental visit), how should the child understand it?

Read Romans 8:18-30. Now read the second aspect of seeing all aspects of God's work as our blessing (middle of page 57). Think of how one difficulty has worked for your holiness.

On point three: we sometimes use the word "grace" to refer only to the initial act of God justifying a sinner. However, all that God gives to a creature is grace. How are even difficulties grace?

Consider how all grace has been purchased by Christ: When you think of even the least grace that you have received, do you consider it to have been bought by Christ's blood? If even bitter trials are things which God has brought together for your good; and that such good was purchased by Christ's blood; then what must grumbling and complaining be?

What is the fifth aspect of seeing all things as coming from the blessing of God?

Read Titus 2:11-13, 1 John 3:1-3, Romans 5:1-5. What sort of view should we constantly have our of circumstances? How should we consider the present in light of what is to come?

Consider a present difficulty. Now think of that difficulty in light of what God is doing. To better understand the difficulty we have in thinking rightly, consider the popularity of the book *Your Best Life Now*. You don't need to know the contents to understand the thesis. How does that thesis compare with Burroughs' instructions for true Christian contentment?

## Study Guide

The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment.5

Pages 60-73

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Pages 60-73

Restate the ninth element of Christian contentment in your own words.

Remember that "grace" involves every good which one receives from God – not merely the initial moment of salvation. Burroughs says that the grace gives to see something even trial and affliction.

The tenth element tells us to perform an action. When we consider an affliction, how must we think of this in light of Jesus' life?

On the top of page 61, Burroughs writes that poverty cannot afflict if what is true?

Read Romans 8:28-29: What is the point of God doing us good? What is God's goal?

If Jesus Christ has done something or suffered something, who are we to think that we are above it?

Read Hebrews 13:11-15 & Matthew 16:24-25. How should we understand the nature of life in light of the way in which Jesus lived?[1]

What is the 11th element of contentment?

Read Hebrews 2:14-18, 4:14-16 & 8:1.

How does understanding the nature of Jesus' life affect us? How can we obtain help from Jesus?

Read Colossians 1:11 & the top paragraph on page 64. What is available to us from Jesus? How do we usually settle to live? Why do you think that is so?

Should we expect that true Christian contentment is the result of our own efforts? (bottom of page 64)

What is the 12 element of contentment?

What does it mean that one "has God" in some circumstance? From whom do all blessings come? Matthew 5:45. Who gives the ability to enjoy a blessing? Ecclesiastes 6:1-3.

Read the top of page 66: What is the creature (anything in all creation) as to the blessing of God? What is that truly satisfies a human being in some-thing or some circumstance? Is God willing to lose any affection from you?(bottom 66)

Augustine wrote, "For he loves You too little who loves anything with You, which he loves not for You" (Confessions 10.29). If we love anything for any reason other than it came from God, then we do not love it rightly. How does this understanding affect your contentment?

What is the "happiness of heaven"? Page 67

On the top of page 69, Burroughs refers to a bird. What does this image mean?

What is the 13th element of contentment?

What is the procedure which Burroughs lays out on the bottom of page 69 to achieve contentment?

Consider a trial or difficulty which currently faces you. Do you know of any promise from God which applies to your situation?

Burroughs then considers some objections: What is the first object and the general answer to the problem?

What three liberties does God have (page 71)?

Burroughs then responds to the question: What if I do have to suffer some ill. He gives two answers. What does he mean by there is no true evil in our sorrows? What must we do when we are faced with a trial?

Consider some difficulty which currently stands before you and ask (this may take some searching of the Scripture)

What good of God does grace permit me to see in the trial?

How must we consider our trial in light of Jesus' life?

Have you/how have you sought strength from God in the midst of trial? What would strength look like (the ability to change the circumstance or to change your heart)?

Have you considered "the happiness of heaven" in light of your trial?

Have you loved any-thing for its own sake and not for the sake of Jesus Christ?

What promises apply to your trial?

Have you considered God's liberties with respect to your circumstance?

Have you mistakenly seen some evil in the trial?

Have you sought out God's purpose in the trial?

Jesus, I my cross have taken,  
All to leave and follow Thee;  
Destitute, despised, forsaken,  
Thou from hence my All shalt be.

The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment week 6  
Study Guide, Chapter 4

1 74-85

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3 An “outward want” means something which we lack from outside of ourselves.  
Restatement the following sentence in your own words: “he is able to make up all his outward wants of creature comforts from what he finds in himself.”

2 Burroughs writes, “this may seem strange.” What is the paradox and difficulty with Burroughs’ statement?

4 Does this mean that a man who has God no longer needs to eat? Matthew 44:1-4;  
Deuteronomy 8:1-3.

5 Does this mean that one who has God no longer needs a family? Matthew 12:46-50;  
Luke 18:28-30.

6 How did Jesus continue steadfast as he went through the cross? Hebrews 12:2.

7 Read Hebrews 11:13-16: How have the saints of God continued through this world, even when they lacked all outward contentments?

8 On the bottom of page 74, Burroughs gives two pictures of those who lack the outward “creature comfort” and yet had contentment. Think through these examples and the Scriptural examples above: What is it that actually gives contentment?

9 Luke 17:21 is a notoriously difficult text: Burroughs makes that plain in his discussion of the text on page 75. Yet, even though the full expression of Jesus’ statement is difficult to understand, Burroughs does state there is something true which can be known concerning Jesus’ words: What is it?

10 What must come to my soul before I can go to heaven?

1 A white stone and new name are mentioned in Revelation 12:17. The words “no one knows except the one who receives it” refers to the intimacy of the relationship

with Christ. Why does Burroughs compare knowledge of the kingdom to knowledge of the white stone.

- 1 Why is it “miserable” to depend upon the creature for contentment?
  - 2 Burroughs quotes James 1:4: Why is the one who is able to endure (the old KJV had ‘patience’) able to be content? How does endurance/patience demonstrate one has an “inheritance”?
  - 3 Burroughs gives an example of a happy and an unhappy home. How does this relate to contentment?
  - 5 Pascal wrote, “All of humanity’s problems stem from man’s inability to sit quietly in a room alone.” How does this relate to Burroughs’ discussion of contentment?
  - 6 There is a common idea in our culture that we can find “peace” or “God” “within.” How does Burroughs’ discussion of the Kingdom differ from the modern New Age idea of god-within?
  - 7 Explain the image of a vessel filled with fluid and another empty.
  - 8 On page 78, Burroughs writes that a certain type of person will be able to understand what he means. What is the characteristic of the person who will understand Burroughs?
  - 9 Do you think he is correct? Do you know this from experience? Have you seen this to be true at times and untrue at other times?
  - 10 Burroughs next states there is a supply of all things from “the covenant”. All of God’s dealings with human beings are in the scope of a covenant. God has no duty to care for us, yet God has made covenants with human beings. Under the Mosaic or “Old” Covenant, God dealt with Israel. Since Christ, we are under the New Covenant. It is in and through God’s covenantal dealings with humanity that we know God are blessed by God.
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- 2 Burroughs gives an example of a home which was secure but now the plague has come to it (in the 17th Century, people did not know how the plague was spread; but when it came, it was routinely fatal, contagious and untreatable. For the plague to come was the worst imaginable state. In 1665, the plague swept through London, killing 8,000 per week. Only a fire which destroyed much of the city stopped the plague.

- 2 How does God's everlasting covenant give rest despite the disorder of this world?
  
- 3 On the bottom of page 79, Burroughs speaks about the instability of all things. We don't feel the danger of this world with the same immediacy of Burroughs or even most people in the world. However, we do see some evidence of this concern in the child's prayer, Now I lay me down to sleep/I pray the Lord my soul to keep./If I should die before I wake,/I pray the Lord my soul to take. Do you think that we are really as secure as we feel ourselves to be?
- 4 Burroughs speaks of how God's Covenant provides insurance for all our loss. (Modern insurance had only recently been developed in England at the time of Burroughs' writing.) In a world where everything can be lost at any time, and everything will be lost eventually (you will die and lose everything you currently own, Ecclesiastes 2:18-19), how does God's Covenant provide insurance?
  
- 4 On the bottom of page 80, Burroughs explains how a man with a new nature should responds when loss and trouble come: what is it?
  
- 5 Burroughs explains that when we face trials, we should turn to the Scripture and find the promise(s) which God has given for one in our position. Take a current trial, then search and find a promise which matches your trial.
  
- 6 Do you come to God with your trials to seek ease and contentment?
  
- 7 "If you are not praying, then you are quietly confident that time, money, and talent are all you need in life. You'll always be a little too tired, a little too busy. But if, like Jesus, you realize you can't do life on your own, then no matter how busy, no matter how tired you are, you will find the time to pray." Paul E. Miller (2011-09-21). *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World* with Bonus Content (p. 49). Navpress. Kindle Edition.

The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment.<sup>7</sup>

Christ's School of Contentment (86-92)

Self-Denial

As you consider this first series of questions, ask yourself, (a) why is this a hard lesson; and (b) do you even consider this to be an actual demand upon you [would you actually do this].

1. What is the first lesson?
  
2. Why does Burroughs write that you must learn this "or you can never be a Christian"?
  
- 4 How does a self-denying heart respond to the "stroke" of God?
  
4. What does yielding produce (page 87)?

5. Read through Psalm 39. How does David respond to the trial of God? Does David assert himself or deny himself? In what ways does David deny himself?

3 What does it mean to “know” that you are “nothing”?

7. What result comes from knowing that you are nothing?

8. What do you deserve?

5 Consider what you deserve, what you have actually *earned* before God? What, in turn, has God given to you? Why then are you discontent?

10. What can you do?

11. What can you do without Christ?

12. Does God have any “need ... of you”?

13. Think of the blessings you have received from God. Now consider what you have done (truly) with all the good things God has given to you? What thing which you have received have not spoiled in some way?

14. If God gives you some-thing, what can you do with it if God does not help?

15. Read Matthew 6:27: What can you do?

16. What has sin made us?

17. Does God need you? If you were to disappear, how would God be lessened?

6 Read James 4:13-17. How does James describe your life?

19. Read Ecclesiastes 6:1-6. How greatly does one depend upon God?

20. Complete this sentence (page 89), “A man who is little in his own eyes ....”

21. Who was the greatest example of self-denial?

22. Read Philippians 2:1-11. In what way did Jesus deny himself?

23. Read Luke 9:23-27: What does Jesus command as a picking of denying yourself? Think through the remainder of the paragraph, what ideas does Jesus join to self-denial? How does wealth or being ashamed of Christ relate to self-denial?

24. How does self-denial lead to contentment?

25. On page 80, no. 8, explain how self-denial leads to contentment.

26. How does selfishness lead to discontentment?

#### Vanity of the Creature

27. What is the second lesson of contentment?

28. Creature means anything which God has made. How is the creature insufficient as a ground for our happiness and contentment?

7 What picture does Burroughs give (middle page 91) of how the creature cannot give contentment?

30. Read Ecclesiastes 2:1-11. When Solomon received every type of good in creation, how did he evaluate its ability to give him contentment?

31. Memorize Ecclesiastes 5:10. What will not give contentment? Luke 6:20-26.

32. Does this mean we should not enjoy any good things which God has given? Ecclesiastes 5:18-20, 9:7-10.

#### The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment.8 Christ's School of Contentment (92-99)

1. What is the "one thing necessary"?

2. Give examples of things which are comfortable but not necessary.

3. What is not necessary?

4. How does Christ teach us the necessity of the "one thing"?

5. What does he mean by "the fear of eternity"?

6. How and why does a proper concern about the "one thing" leave you satisfied?

7. When are our hearts most troubled by every-thing?

8. What sort of persons does Burroughs describe as "most discontented"?

9. He gives an example of a man who is not troubled with the "meaner things" [this which are of less importance]: explain that example.

10. When is the heart most easily troubled?

11. What is the cure for such a heart?

12. Now consider: What takes the attention of your heart? Where is your treasure? If you could have just one thing, what would be it be? What is your true "one thing necessary"? What thing, if you lost it, would trouble you most?

13. What is the 4th thing taught in the school of contentment?

14. Read Genesis 3:22-24: What took place? Where were human beings created to live? Where do we now live?

15. Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-11: What is the nature the place in which we find ourselves in this life?

16. Read Galatians 1:4: What does Paul call our present age?
17. Read 1 Peter 1:1-2: How does Peter describe Christians?
18. Read Hebrews 11:8-16. How are the faithful believers described? In what do they hope?
19. Burroughs gives the example of hardships which befall a traveler. Things have become much better for travelers of late, so you will have to pretend a bit to follow his argument. What sort of insults should a traveler expect? What does the traveler overlook such hardships?
20. How are all human beings travelers?
21. What sort of thinking permits a traveler to overlook troubles?
22. How does that thinking pertain to our daily life when we are living at home?
23. Middle of page 95: What sort of thinking must we have when it comes to seeking contentment?
24. Middle of page 95: When you see another person with a desirable piece of property, how ought one to think?
25. Bottom of page 95: What sort of thinking is madness?
26. How does Paul describe the Christian in 2 Timothy 2:3. How does Burroughs describe how such a one should think and live? Do you?
27. Bottom of page 96: What sort of thinking is necessary to be content? Why do you think such thoughts are hard for you? Who tells you that you should expect ease and comfort which the exile, the traveler, the pilgrim, the soldier should not expect? What detracts you from such thinking? What helps you to such thinking?
28. How are we supposed to understand the benefits of the creature (all things which God has created?)
29. Burroughs gives an example of how a carnal heart and a Christian should each differently consider the value of wealth? Compare and contrast.
30. Middle page 98: How does God get glory from his creatures?
31. What do you have? How do you use it to give God glory?
32. Do you think that if you looked upon all that you have as opportunities for giving God glory, that it would affect your contentment?
33. Imagine someone who owned a beautiful car and had a dreadful disease. Would such a person be content with their car if they were trying to use it to cure their disease?

The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment, Study Guide.9

.entry-header

The previous post in this series may be found [here](#)

The

- 5 Read Philippians 4:12: What are the categories of temptation which Paul lists?
- 6 What temptation to discontentment does Burroughs list on page 103?
- 7 Burroughs mentions two types of “trouble” on pages 103-4. What are they?
- 8 Read 1 Timothy 6:10. What sort of trouble does money bring?
- 9 What is the precise “root” – note the language used.
- 10 Look to the second half of 6:10: how does Paul further define the effect of money; what does it produce in a human being?
- 11 Contentment necessarily includes “having enough”. How then does money tempt

- one to be discontent? Is it possible to desire money and be content?
- 12 Read the definition of contentment on page 40 of the book and compare that to what Jesus says in Matthew 6:24. How does money directly attack contentment?
- 13 Stop and consider when or whether you have been tempted to discontentment desiring money? Has desire for money ever led you to sin? Have you been angry, covetous, envious, et cetera as a result of the desire for money?
- 14 In addition to discontent caused by the desire for money, Burroughs mentions the discontentment caused by the possession of money. He uses the image of a town which deceives one upon entry. Read 1 Timothy 6:17-19. How does money which you have tempt you to discontentment?
- 15 Read James 1:9-11: How does money possessed tempt one to sin?
- 16 Read Matthew 6:19-21: How does money possessed tempt one to sin?
- 17 Burroughs gives a picture of the effects of money possessed by discussing the behavior of insects around light or honey. He is explaining that money attracts temptations, like light or honey attract pests.
- 18 Now, most of us do not consider ourselves rich –rich people always have more money than us. Yet, the average life of a human in the West is far beyond what most people in the history of the world could imagine for themselves – and far beyond what most people in the world currently experience. Moreover, even small amount of property is sufficient to encourage sin – when Jesus preached, he primarily spoke to poor people. How then have you found yourself tempted to sin by the possession of money? Consider the examples given in 1 Timothy, James & Matthew.
- 19 On pages 105-6, Burroughs expands the weight of prosperity beyond just money. There is a prosperity of position which also brings along certain burdens. Look at the picture of Presidents on the day they were sworn into office and the day they retired. Consider persons who have positions that include a certain degree of respect or responsibility, what is the effect upon them? Or consider single people who think that if they had a spouse and children their life would be better – and then consider the difficulties which come with marriage & parenthood.
- 20 On pages 106-7, Burroughs mentions the particular burdens which come with ministry. This was something Burroughs knew very well: When he was a poor and little known pastor and when he was a well-known pastor he experienced a great deal of trouble. In fact, he wrote *The Rare Jewel* when he was apparently prospering in ministry because he realized the difficulties and temptations.
- 21 Consider all of the ways in which God has prospered you. Now, consider: What duties does your prosperity and position require of you?
- 22 After you consider you duties, how do you think you will do when it comes time for you to give an account to God as to whether you have fulfilled your duties?
- 23 On page 109, Burroughs states the “most dreadful evil”; what is it?
- 24 How often have you been discontent because God has not given you what you most desire?
- 25 Do you think that you are desiring the “most dreadful evil”?
- 26 How is your heart’s desire the “most dreadful evil”?
- 27 At the bottom of page 109, Burroughs lists the greatest sign of God’s wrath: What is it?

- 28 Middle of page 110, how does God “convey the plague of his curse”?
- 29 Do you believe Burroughs on this point? Are you tempted to think he got it wrong?
- 30 On the bottom of page 110, Burroughs sets out worst sort of judgments. What is the worst form of judgment from God? Why do we tend to think that material prosperity is the greatest sort of good? Romans 1:21-25.
- 31 What is the ninth and last lesson of contentment?
- 32 Question 11 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism (which would express Burroughs’ position) reads as follows: “Q. 11. What are God’s works of providence A. God’s works of providence are his most holy, wise and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.” In short, God is sovereign over everything that happens. You also must know that this does not mean that human beings have no ability to make decisions. We do exactly what we want to do, and it is always what God has determined. That is very confusing, but Burroughs who have believed both to be true.
- 33 On the top of page 112, Burroughs explains the scope of providence. How does knowing the scope of providence affect contentment? If it helps, look back at the definition on page 40?
- 34 If God is completely sovereign and you are discontent, then you must believe what about God?
- 35 In the middle of page 112, Burroughs explains the foolishness of raging against providence: what does he say?
- 36 Page 113, what don’t we understand about providence when we are angry at what God has done?
- 37 An example of providence is included at the end.
- 38 What is the foolishness of discontentment when viewed in light of God’s Providence?
- 39 On page 114, Burroughs identifies a reason that Christians often have difficulty taking comfort in God’s providence: what is it?
- 40 What is the usual way that God deals with His people in this world? Page 115.
- 41 If God doesn’t deal with you in this way, what might it mean? Hebrews 12:8.
- 42 To whom does God give His greatest mercies?
- 43 What is the way of God working? Page 117.
- 44 Take a matter in which you are discontent. Then quickly run over the nine lessons for contentment given by Burroughs. After you examine your discontentment in light of these lessons, explain why you are right in continuing to be discontent.

A recent example of providence:

Crisis of War Turned to Gospel Opportunity in Ukraine

We pass along this recent experience of Dr. Bob Provost, President of SGA and TMS Board Member as told by Bruce Alvord (M.Div.’92, Th.M.’98):

“Traveling through Kiev, Dr. Robert Provost told us what he had seen in another city of Ukraine. There is a people group in Crimea called the Tartars, who are Russian-speaking Muslims and were persecuted by Stalin. As a result of the recent Russian invasion of Crimea, some of these Tartars have fled north to other parts of Ukraine. In the city that Dr. Provost was in, the director of a Baptist bible college asked the students if they would

vacate their dorm rooms for the refugee families and sleep on mats on the classroom floors. They did.

Sixty Muslim refugees came – twenty adults (including an Imam – a Muslim mosque leader) and forty children. When they realized they were being taken for refuge to a Christian place, they were afraid. They feared there would be icons on the walls (which they would have to cover, believing them to be evil) and that they would have to hide their women from drunken, adulterous ‘priests.’ However, having no other option, they stayed. To their surprise, they found themselves and their children being treated kindly and sleeping in their hosts’ beds. They were shocked. They told the students, ‘If our places were switched, we would never do this for you. Why are you helping us?!’ After hearing the explanation, the Imam became interested in reading the Bible, but only under two conditions: the Bible couldn’t have a cross on it, and it had to have study notes explaining the text! Dr. Provost said, “Well, we happen to have just such a Bible here.” The Russian translation of the MacArthur Study Bible had been completed and didn’t have a cross on the cover!”

## Study Guide 10

Burroughs now moves to the question of motivation: it will take work to "learn" (Phil. 4:11) how to be content. Contentment is a heavenly flower, a mark of the age to come, and it is not common to this world. If anything, contentment has only become more difficult for people living at this time, because we live in a world that engages in constant propaganda to make us discontent. This is a fact noted by all. [From those who are negative to Christianity](#), "The whole thing [advertising] is a set up to keep us unhappy and foolishly intent on spending our way out this unhappiness." But it was noted far earlier by Solomon,

Ecclesiastes 1:8 (ESV)

<sup>8</sup> All things are full of weariness;  
a man cannot utter it;  
the eye is not satisfied with seeing,  
nor the ear filled with hearing.

There are all the false offers of happiness in this world. Even though they all end the same (Ecclesiastes 2:11), we find them irresistible (Jer. 2:25). Therefore, breaking off from these false hopes and setting our hope in God such that we will do the work to learn contentment with God's will for our lives -- even when it crosses our desires -- will require a hope in that contentment is better than what we have now.

It is to this task which Burroughs turns.

1. How does Burroughs describe the result of this learning? If we have learned contentment, what would be the nature of our speaking about contentment? Read Philippians 4:1-13, the passage where Paul says that he has learned contentment. What is the tone taken by Paul in this passage? Verse 13 is a famous verse: in context, what is that God gives Paul the strength to do?

2. Why does Burroughs note that even the greatest pagans thought contentment a great goal?

3. The worship due God. In raising this issue, Burroughs is both showing us the greatness of contentment, and at the same time, raising the greatest barrier to contentment.

A. How does Burroughs first define contentment? In particular note the aspect of free submission.

B. What sort of thoughts, desires and fears keep you from freely submitting to God's will for your life? If they hold that God is sovereign, and that our present circumstance must work for good, then what must we think when our present circumstance runs contrary to our will? What must we think about ourselves? What must we think about God?

C. How does willing submission to God help bring about contentment?

D. Why should giving God proper worship be a motivation for contentment? Honestly, does that seem like a sufficient reason?

E. Burroughs uses some language which may sound offensive to your dignity, when he discusses worship. Read Genesis 3:5. Does this lie of the Serpent help shed light on why this is difficult for us?

F. Look at a few passages involving humans meeting God:

- i. Leviticus 10:1-3
- ii. Deuteronomy 5:22-27
- iii. Isaiah 6:1-5
- iv. Ezekiel 1
- v. Luke 5:8
- vi. Luke 9:34
- vii. Revelation 1:17

G. What is wrong with our natural thoughts about God? ii

H. How does Burroughs describe the greatness of this aspect of worship?

I. Read Revelation 5: i) What sort of worship does Christ receive from those who know him best? ii) What is the basis for this worship? iii) Do you rightly value this worth? iv) Is it wise to submit one's condition and life to such wisdom? v) Read Romans 8:31-32: is there any good which God would not give you?

## **2. There is a Great Deal of Grace in Contentment:**

The second point made by Burroughs has to do with the "grace" which is poured out in contentment.

To understand this argument, it will be necessary to understand that the Puritians routinely used the word "grace" in a different manner than it is typically used by contemporary Christians. In contemporary usage, the word "grace" often refers only to the initial act of God's saving work, "For by grace you have been saved" (Eph. 2:8). More broadly, it is God's mercy towards our remnant sin.

When Puritans used the word, they routinely referenced God's grace as the various operations of God's good will toward us and work in us.

Consider the following passage from John Owen:

If we neglect to make use of what we have received, God may justly hold his hand from giving us more. His graces, as well as his gifts, are bestowed on us to use, exercise, and trade with.

John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, "The Mortification of Sin," vol. 6 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, n.d.), 13. And:

By causing our hearts to abound in *grace* and the fruits that are contrary to the flesh, and the fruits thereof and principles of them. So the apostle opposes the fruits of the flesh and of the Spirit: "The fruits of the flesh," says he, "are so and so," Gal. 5:19–21; "but," says he, "the fruits of the Spirit are quite contrary, quite of another sort," verses 22, 23. Yea; but what if these are in us and do abound, may not the other abound also? No, says he, verse 24, "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." But how? Why, verse 25, "By living in the Spirit and walking after the Spirit;"—that is, by the abounding of these graces of the Spirit in us, and walking according to them.

John Owen, at p. 19. Grace is something that God does in us and through. Grace is not merely the disposition of God nor just our realization of God's disposition, but grace God's good work. That is why Burroughs writes in this section, "*That in Contentment there is much exercise of grace*".

Contentment is to be prized by the believer, because in action evidences much of God's good work in our lives.

1. Before we analyze Burroughs' argument, why would evidence of God working in one's life be desirable? In this prayer from *The Valley of Vision*, the unknown author refers to his preconversion life as "graceless":

O Lord, I am astonished at the difference between my receivings and my deservings,  
between the state I am now in and my past gracelessness,  
between the heaven I am bound for  
and the hell I merit.

Edited by Arthur Bennett. The Valley of Vision (Kindle Locations 213-215). The Banner of Truth Trust. What does "graceless" mean? Does that help understand what clear knowledge of God's grace would be a comfort and encouragement?

1. Burroughs writes:

*Much exercise of grace*, There is a composition of grace in Contentment, there is faith, and there is humility, and love, and there is patience, and there is wisdom, and there is hope, all graces almost are compounded, it is in oil that hath the ingredients of all kind of graces, and therefore though you cannot see the particular grace, yet in this oil you have it all;

A. What are the various things which Burroughs lists as separate graces? What makes up the "composition of grace"?

B. Use your knowledge and a concordance to find passages in the Bible which extol each faith, humility, love, patience, wisdom.

C. Exercise of faith:

1. What must one believe to exercise contentment when the present circumstances do not support any contentment? What must one believe about a difficult circumstance to be able to exercise contentment?

2. Read 1 Peter 1:3-9: What basis does Peter provide for the believer to exercise contentment in the midst of trials?

3. Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-18: What basis does Paul provide for the believer to exercise contentment?

4. Think of what makes it difficult to exercise contentment in the midst of difficulties: how then do Peter & Paul provide a basis for contentment? How do the promises of God answer the trouble such that one can be contentment now where troubles are great?

5. What made the disciples troubled? Mark 4:35-41.

D. Humility. How do you think that humility relates to the question of contentment? Consider it the opposite way, how does pride spur discontentment?

1. Read Isaiah 66:1-3. What makes a person humble? How is humility described in this passage?

2. Compare this aspect of humility (trembling) with faith which supports contentment: how does humility support faith and contentment?

E. Wisdom:

1. Read Proverbs 1:20-33. What is promised here by humility?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31.
  - a. What is the wisdom of this world when faced by trouble?
  - b. How does God's wisdom display itself in this world: what did God's greatest act of "wisdom" look like when played out on earth? (Read Psalm 2 and realize that the Psalm refers to the crucifixion of Christ. How did Christ's death look to God (when on earth it looked like defeat)?
  - c. How then does such wisdom relate to a contentment which is not dependent upon present appearances? Phil. 1:27-30, 3:7-11; 2 Corinthians 12:10

F. Hope:

1. Read Romans 5:1-5
  - a. What is the hope which Paul identifies in this passage?
  - b. What produces this hope?
2. Understand that hope controls human direction, motivation, conduct, et cetera. We do what we hope. Hope is not merely motivation for something which we otherwise desire: hope is bound up in the desire itself. Our will is formed by our greatest desire/hope. We are discontentment, because our hope has been thwarted. (Imagine you wanted to get a ticket for some event. If you do not get the ticket, you are disappointed. Imagine now you hear some "sold-out" event which did not want to attend. You are not disappointed. This is a trivial example, but it helps illustrate the point).
3. Read Col. 1:24-28, compare this Paul's words in Romans 5:1-5. Are suffering and hope contrary? If we obtain that for which we hope, how can we not be content?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 1:8-8, what does suffering produce? Do you see how suffering causes the loss of one hope so that it will be substituted by a better hope?

G. How then do these elements help produce contentment in the believer?

H. If our hope and faith are set upon God's provision of what God promises, and if we are sufficiently humble to not substitute our own goals for God, will that produce contentment?

### **3. There is a great deal of strength in contentment.**

Strength in the Christian, and pointedly strength in contentment, proceeds by paradox. We are weak when it comes to contentment and we cannot force ourselves into a true godly contentment by any force of will. To be strong in contentment we "boast" in our

weakness and be receptive to the strength of God which is super-abundant grace for contentment.

Paul learned this (remember that contentment is a skill which is learned) in weakness forced upon him by God.

A Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

- 1 What has the unnamed man (Paul) received? vv. 1-2
- 2 Why do you suppose Paul refers to himself in third person?
- 3 Of what will Paul boast? v. 5 (see 2 Cor. 11:30-33).
- 4 What did God do with Paul? v. 7

The identity of the thorn has been the subject of a great many speculations. Paul does not say what it is. What we do know is that it was a matter of extraordinary pain and suffering for him.

We might miss this, because "thorn" sounds like something which would only scratch or annoy us. But,

The word translated "thorn" (*skolops*) occurs only here in the New Testament. It refers to something pointed such as a stake for impaling, a medical instrument, or a thorn. "Stake" would be a better translation, though "thorn" has dominated English renderings of the word. The metaphor carries "the notion of something sharp and painful which sticks deeply in the flesh and in the will of God defies extracting.

David E. Garland, [\*2 Corinthians\*](#), vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 519, fns. omitted.

- 5 Why does God do this? v. 7
- 6 What does Paul do? v. 8
- 7 How does God answer Paul's prayer? v. 9
- 8 What is the answer? v. 9
- 9 Does God provide Paul help? In what way? v. 10
- 11 How does this teach Paul contentment?

Human beings are by nature deficient, dependent creatures. We were created dependent upon God for existence, strength, knowledge, holiness. We cannot cause ourselves to even exist. We need food and clothing. (1 Tim. 6:6-8). We need the help of others. We need counsel from God. The first temptation was temptation to be autonomous: it was the illusion that we could live independent of God. (Gen. 3:5). The result of that foolish act has been insanity. (Rom. 1:18-31). The idea that we could live independently of God has resulted in our discontentment. Therefore, we must be brought to see that we cannot live without Him: we must know how weak we are in fact, so that we will willingly receive the strength of God. 2 Cor. 1:8-9.

XXXVI. *Prayer answered by Crosses*

<sup>1</sup> I ask'd the Lord, that I might grow  
In faith, and love, and ev'ry grace,  
Might more of his salvation know,  
And seek more earnestly his face.

<sup>2</sup> 'Twas he who taught me thus to pray,  
And he, I trust has answer'd pray'r;  
But it has been in such a way,  
As almost drove me to despair.

<sup>3</sup> I hop'd that in some favour'd hour,  
At once he'd answer my request:  
And by his love's constraining pow'r,  
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

<sup>4</sup> Instead of this, he made me feel  
The hidden evils of my heart;  
And let the angry pow'rs of hell  
Assault my soul in ev'ry part.

<sup>5</sup> Yea more, with his own hand he seem'd  
Intent to aggravate my woe;  
Cross'd all the fair designs I schem'd,  
Blasted my gourds, and laid me low.

<sup>6</sup> Lord, why is this, I trembling cry'd,  
Wilt thou pursue thy worm to death?  
" 'Tis in this way," the Lord reply'd,  
I answer pray'r for grace and faith.

<sup>7</sup> These inward trials I employ,  
From self and pride to set thee free;  
And break thy schemes of earthly joy,  
That thou mayst seek thy all in me."

John Newton and Richard Cecil, [\*The Works of John Newton\*](#), vol. 3 (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., 1824), 607–608.