

Week Five

The Liberty of Contentment | Mark 10:35-45; Philippians 4:11-13

On a scale of one to ten, how content would you say you are? This question is not easy to answer, since it can depend on the day, the hour, the minute... how much sleep you've had or how long it's been since you've last eaten... what the weather is like, or how stressful work is! Our level of contentment can be even more erratic if we measure it with what our neighbour has in his home or what our co-worker earned last year. Noticing the things we want – or “mis-want” – shows us what we truly believe will make us content on this journey of life.

The term “mis-wanting” was coined by researchers Tim Wilson and Dan Gilbert, and it refers to the tendency of people to desire things that don't make them satisfied in the long run. We think more money, a good job, dream house or perfect looks will make our life better, but science shows they don't – or at least much less than we think they will. For example, numerous studies show that once we have the income to cover our basic needs, there is no salary we are actually content with.

The reality is: we get used to things. Our reference point for happiness constantly changes. So, to help ourselves want things that truly matter, it takes a perspective reset. For instance, do you want a deeper connection with God? Then you need to take seriously that His love and holiness are unlike anything else in this world. It's difficult to be closer to God if we fail to adjust ourselves to His standards, especially when we prioritise the “mis-wanted” parts of our lives instead.

We need to remember our role as representatives of Christ, instead of people who chase diminishing rewards. That very act of laying down what we mistakenly thought would make us happy will actually bring contentment.

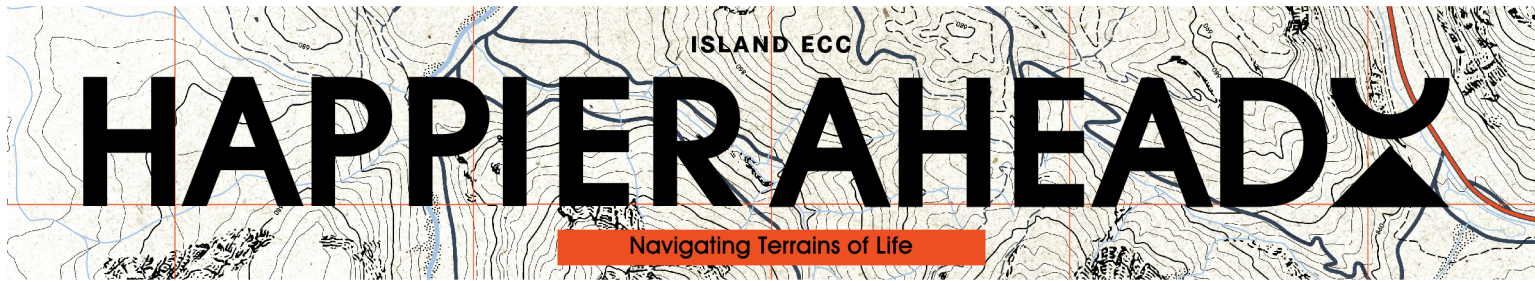
Opening Questions

- 1 / What is something that you really want right now? Try to answer this as honestly as you can.
- 2 / What is one area of your life where you constantly compare yourself to other people? (Work, income, appearance, etc.)

Bible Study & Questions

Read Mark 10:35-45 and Philippians 4:11-13, and discuss the following questions:

- 1 / In the passage in Mark 10, James and John ask Jesus for positions of honour and authority. How does this reveal a tendency towards comparison and competition among the disciples?
- 2 / Discuss how comparison and the desire for status can creep into our lives as Christians. In what ways do you still struggle with it?
- 3 / Jesus responds by asking the disciples to “drink the cup” that He will drink. What does the cup refer to and is this what you truly “want”?
Note: This cup is the cup of wrath that Jesus references in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39). This would be a good opportunity to dig a little deeper as to why we don't generally “want” the life that Jesus presents. What keeps us from “wanting” to drink the cup?
- 4 / Read Philippians 4:11-13. Paul says he has learned the “secret” of being content. What do you think this “secret” is, and how can we apply it to our lives?



5 / In verse 13, Paul says, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” How does this support the idea of being content in difficult circumstances?

Note: Unfortunately, many take this verse out of context to justify a hard-nosed approach to life. However, this verse is really about learning contentment in all situations.

6 / What are some practical ways to apply the principles of contentment found in these two passages to our daily lives?

Prayer Activity

This week’s study has helped us learn about how comparison can be a hindrance to contentment. And oftentimes that comparison is rooted in the false desires that we have. We need a perspective realignment.

This week’s prayer activity will help the group focus on the kingdom of God. There are seven parables that begin with the phrase “the kingdom of God is like...” Each of those parables teaches us about one aspect of the kingdom that we ought to long for.

Step one: Assign a different parable to each person. If there are more than seven people in your group, have multiple people read the same parable.

Step two: Have each person share an aspect of the kingdom that they see from the parable they read.

Step three: Pray as a group for each aspect that was shared.

Individual idea: Read all the parables yourself and jot down one aspect of the kingdom that you see for each Psalm. Then put it all together by journaling a prayer about what you imagine the kingdom of God to be like. Keep this journal entry and reread it every week.