

From Consumption to Contentment

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle

Prayer of Illumination

Lord Christ,
we believe in you.
Help our unbelief. Amen.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 6:1-10 (RNJB)*

As fellow-workers we appeal to you also not to accept the grace of God in vain, for he says: At an acceptable time I listened to you, and in the day of salvation I helped you. See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation. We put no obstacles in anyone's way to keep our ministry free of blame, but in every way we commend ourselves as servants of God through great endurance, in hardships, in need, in oppression, in beatings, in imprisonment, in riots, in labors, in lack of sleep and lack of food; by purity, by knowledge, by patience, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by genuine love, in the word of truth, in the power of God, with the weapons of righteousness on the right and on the left, with honor and dishonor, with bad reputation and good; taken as imposters and yet genuine, taken as unknown and yet well known, taken as dying; and see, we are alive, as punished yet not put to death, as sad yet always rejoicing, as beggars yet enriching many, as destitute yet having everything.

*The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.*

* Revised New Jerusalem Bible (RNJB) —*This translation is not yet available online.*

A Kindle version is currently available here: <https://www.amazon.com/Revised-New-Jerusalem-Bible-ebook/dp/B078VWWLGT>

SERMON – From Consumption to Contentment

"Drop your tools!" yelled fire crew foreman Wagner Dodge.

David Epstein in his fascinating book *Range* tells about Montana's devastating 1949 Mann Gulch Fire. Smokejumpers were parachuted in to face a "10:00 Fire," meaning that the firemen planned to contain the flames by 10:00 am the next morning.

But mother nature had another plan—the fire jumped across the gulch from one forested slope to the steep slope where the firefighters were. At a pace of eleven feet per second, the roaring flames chased them uphill through dry grass.

"Drop your tools!" yelled Wagner Dodge. Forget you're a firefighter. Forget your tools! Become a sprinter. Two men immediately dropped their tools and ran for dear life. They made it over the ridge to safety. But not all followed orders. Some ran with their tools. They didn't make it—thirteen of them. The tragedy led to major reforms in safety training.

There's something inside all of us that just doesn't want to drop our beloved tools—even if it means our downfall.

"Come, follow me," beckons Jesus.

At once, they dropped their nets and followed Jesus.

What do you need to drop?

Psychologist and organizational behavior expert Karl Weick writes that, dropping one's tools is a proxy for unlearning, for adaptation, for flexibility. It's the very unwillingness of people to drop their tools that turns dramas ... into tragedies.

This also happens to us spiritually. We find false security in our tools, toys, and safety nets. And we get spiritually weighed down and tangled up. Going against orders to drop our tools, we cling to our stuff thinking that our life and joy and our salvation are found in them. Materialism and anxiety engulf us. We become consumed with our problems and fears and lack. Some call it affluenza. You could also call it "the consumption."

The book of Hebrews gives us wise counsel:

Throw off everything that weighs us down and the sin that clings so closely, and with perseverance keep running the race which lies ahead of us, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Immanuel, let's drop our tools and run to God.

Contentment, *Christian contentment*, is counterintuitive. It's about the willingness and the wisdom of dropping our tools.

Fulfillment isn't found where we naturally look for it: in stuff, in tools, in recognition, accolades, a successful job, or a comfortable or "flawless" life.

The wisdom of contentment teaches us that joy is independent of our circumstances and our stuff. Our joy is found in God and doing what God has called us to do.

The key to life-satisfaction isn't self-sufficiency—It's found in God-sufficiency, no matter our situation or station in life.

When we're God-sufficient, we're able to tap into a strength and purpose beyond ourselves. We can drop on the spot what doesn't matter. We can courageously face whatever's thrown our way—unencumbered.

It's important to realize that Paul *isn't* saying we should ignore, deny, or suppress our sorrow or suffering. Rather, we acknowledge it AND make a profound decision to let it go and trust in God.

Then, by the grace of God, we become detached from our attachments. We hold on to Christ and one another. We're free to travel light.

Paul had one path and prize in life that remained constant through:

- the ups and downs
- the highs and lows
- in prosperity and poverty
- sickness and health
- through the cheers and the boos
- victory and defeat
- success and failure
- smooth sailing and troubled waters

Paul's path and purpose was consistent:

Be an authentic and faithful follower of Christ no matter what.

He cleared out all obstacles that got in the way of Christ. This is how to pivot from consumption to contentment. Faith in Christ helps us know what to drop—and what to hold on to. Drop your smokescreens. Let down your guard.

But God's also rooting for us to grab ahold of the eternal—have a firm grip of purity and understanding, patience, kindness, and genuine love. Hold on for dear life to the word of truth, the power of God, the spiritual armor—these are things that you can take with you.

And so with God's unlimited resources and divine strength, we in our human limitedness and weakness can become living oxymorons, paradoxically, being both:

Sad—yet rejoicing.
Anxious—yet at peace.
Penniless—yet enriching others.
Suffering—yet hopeful.
Dying—yet living.
Having nothing—yet possessing all.

By God's grace and power, adversity betters us, rather than embitters us. Faith expands, rather than constricts our hearts. Trust transfigures our broken hearts to broken-open hearts that God can then fill up with his loving-kindness.

Don't live life with a tight-fisted heart.
Stay open. Receptive.
Don't white-knuckle your tools.
Let them drop. And then run free.

The word that Paul uses for this mindset in our passage is steadfast endurance—*hupomone* in the Greek. *Hupomone* isn't a passive resignation that merely absorbs life's blows with hands folded. No the gift of *hupomone*—steadfast endurance—is that divine mindset that helps us be not only resilient, but also to live triumphantly and transformationally—where we're strong in the broken places.

The early church father, St. John of Chrysostom, said this of *hupomone* centuries ago:

It's the root of all goods,
the mother of piety,
the fruit that never withers,
a fortress that is never taken,
a harbor that knows no storms
and the queen of all virtues,
the foundation of right actions,
peace in war, calm in tempest,
and security in plots.

God's *hupomone* makes it possible for us to pass through the breaking point ... and not break. *Hupomone* imparts a holy "figureoutableness" and a divine "sticktoitiveness" to our challenges. Christ teaches us how to follow him and drop our tools, without dropping the ball. The Spirit helps us cut out the extraneous and keep the essential. By the grace of God, a stewardship takes place—from consumption to contentment in all of life's seasons: in sickness and in health, in joy and sorrow, in plenty and in want.

I agree with Paul:

The right time is *now*...
Today is the day of deliverance.
Expand your soul. Live wholeheartedly.
Run to God's glory.

Drop your tools.

Amen.

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