

A. CONTENTMENT AND HOPE

- Our last lesson in the Learning to Lean series focused on obstacles to learning to be content. Among them are unresolved issues below the surface or from the past.
- As we lean into the emotions surrounding our areas of discontent and invite the Lord to uncover the root causes, He will bring truth and healing to our hearts.
- Another huge roadblock to contentment is disappointment. Disappointment undermines the most essential element of leaning on God – trust.
- When feelings of hopelessness and disappointment are consistently present, it is very difficult to maintain a mindset of contentment.
- Scholars consider “discontent” and “hopeless” to be near synonyms.
- “Studies have found that hope is positively correlated with life satisfaction and serves as a buffer against the impact of negative and stressful life events.” (Taylor Liberta)
- The Apostle Paul knew the true source of hope and writes here about how a hopeful heart protects us from disappointment and discontent: Romans 5:1-5 NLT-- Since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us.² Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God’s glory. ³We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. ⁴And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. ⁵And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.
- Paul offers several sources of authentic hope that enable us to lean into God, our hearts confidently expecting to see His goodness. This enhances our contentment.
- Insights:

B. GOD’S WORK

- Jesus has done everything necessary to make us right with God so that our new hearts are at peace with God and in agreement with His words and ways.
- Christ’s work of justification is “a legal declaration in which God pardons the sinner of all his sins and accepts and accounts the sinner as righteous in His sight.” (G. Waters)
- Our justification allows us to Lean! It places us in a relationship based on grace and favor vs. our own efforts, works, or even good intentions.
- We can learn hope in the place of our disappointment. As John Piper writes, “The first human counterpart to divine grace is hope.”
- Now and forever we “stand” in God’s grace. This verb “stand” is in the perfect tense meaning it happened in the past and continues to be true in the present as well.
- Because we are standing in grace from this time forward, we value and can appropriate all the principles and promises of God. Examples include:
 - Grace means God is at work in us to transform us: 1 Cor 15:10 NLV-- I am different now. It is all because of what God did for me by His loving-favor.

- Grace offers us continual breakthrough: 2 Cor 1:10-- He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.
- Grace enables us to obey when tempted: 1 Cor 10:13b AMP-- He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability [to resist], but along with the temptation He [has in the past and is now and] will [always] provide the way out as well, so that you will be able to endure it [without yielding, and will overcome temptation with joy].
- Grace allows us to see that God's instructions are always the best choice: Ps 112:1 NLT-- How joyful are those who fear the LORD and delight in obeying his commands.
- Grace makes our lives a testimony to others: Ps 78:7 NLT-- Each generation should set its hope anew on God, not forgetting his glorious miracles and obeying his commands.
- Hope grows as we lean on Jesus' work vs. feeling like disappointments to God!
- LISTENING EXERCISE: *Can you see how a deeper grasp of the power of God's grace toward you can provide you with more hope and contentment?
What specific areas of your life would be most impacted by embracing grace?*

- Insights:

C. GOD'S PRESENCE

- Understanding that we have constant access to God's presence will bolster our levels of hope and contentment: Rom 5:2 AMP-- Through Him we also have access by faith into this [remarkable state of] grace in which we [firmly and safely and securely] stand. Let us rejoice in our hope *and* the confident assurance of [experiencing and enjoying] the glory of [our great] God [the manifestation of His excellence and power].
- Paul counted on God's presence in any and every circumstance. He experienced great joy and hope as the Lord's glory was made evident through his life!
- How much of God's nearness we actually access is directly related to our degree of wellbeing and contentment: Ps 42:5 NASB—Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence.
- Whenever we allow obstacles to deter us from the presence of God, our contentment and hope levels begin to drop. We are more prone to false hope.
- "A false hope is an expectation that is extremely unlikely to be satisfied. This is likely to cause an individual to waste their resources and become disappointed." (John Spacey)
- Our false hopes are those things that we wrongly believe will satisfy us – these include image, power, possessions, and the approval of others.
- LISTENING QUESTION:
Lord, please highlight the areas where am I currently dissatisfied or disappointed.

In these particular places, I ask You to show me if I've extended false or inappropriate hope in something or someone that can never fully satisfy me.

- False hope will eventually lead to disappointment. Instead, God's glory, experienced as we immerse ourselves in His presence, brings us deep satisfaction in the form of:
 - Authentic hope
 - Faith
 - A renewed mind
 - Direction
 - Fresh vision
 - Contagious joy
 - A safe place to detect lies and false hopes
- Ps 73:28 MSG-- I'm in the very presence of God— oh, how refreshing it is! I've made Lord God my home. God, I'm telling the world what you do!
- Let's take advantage of our access to God's presence. The hope that we find there encourages us in our journey of learning to lean and learning to be content!
- Insights:

PERSONAL APPLICATION

A. ONE THING

The One Thing that I'd like to take away from today's class and believe God to accomplish in my life is:

B. PONDER THE TRUTH

- Which Scripture in this lesson stood out to you the most? Write it out below and take some time to review it often this week.
- Practice listening to God as you meditate on your Scripture and your One Thing. Be still and expectant in His presence. Record your insights here or in your spiritual journal.

C. PRAY IT IN

Take your One Thing and your verse and turn them into a prayer:

"Lord, where do You want to apply these truths to my particular life circumstances?"

“What are some specific strategies for incorporating this truth into my thinking and actions?”

D. SING IT

- Use music as part of your relational time with God. It expands your experience of His presence by engaging a different part of your brain! Note how you are impacted:

E. PERSONALIZE IT

Consider these questions early in the week. Ask the Spirit to guide you into a deeper understanding of the truth and to reveal His pathway for growth. Keep a written record of your applications and insights.

Contentment and Hope

- As we seek to learn contentment, continue to be on the lookout for the obstacles that we have identified to date. Ask the Spirit to reveal any of these mindsets that are hindering you:
 - Doubt
 - Greed
 - Covetousness
 - Self-pity
 - Envy
 - Jealousy
 - Comparison
 - Bitterness
 - Unforgiveness
 - Pride
 - Entitlement
 - Offense
 - Thorns
 - Weaknesses
 - Lack of vulnerability
 - Disappointment
- Write down 2 or 3 obstacles that you commonly experience.

- Do you experience a sense of hopelessness around these obstacles? How does that look on you and what other feelings does it evoke?

- Are you open to the idea that your lack of hope and contentment could be due to something in your past experience?

- Listening prayer can uncover the reasons that these issues continue to crop up. Ask for assistance from your group leader if you are new to this practice. Here are the basic steps:
 1. *“Help me, Father, identify my most predominant feelings around this situation:”*

Get in touch with these emotions and be present to them as you come to God in prayer.

2. *“Lord, please bring to your mind a time when I felt these same feelings.”* It can be a:
 - Specific memory
 - Environment that you experienced over and over in the past
 - Symbolic mental picture
 - Persistent feelings with no memory attached
3. *“Holy Spirit, I ask you to show me what is the message I came to believe at this time?”*
4. *“Jesus, what is the truth here?”*

God’s Work

- How completely are you convinced that God relates to you through grace instead of your efforts, works or good intentions? Be honest and specific:
- Take some time to reflect on God’s work in your behalf. Ask Him to remind you of specific instances of these aspects of grace in your own life. Write these memories down and be sure to thank Him for each expression of His amazing grace toward you:
 - A changed heart and life
 - Breaking through to new perspectives and freedom
 - Victory over sin
 - New appetites and behaviors
 - Being used in the life of another person

Presence of God

- How likely are you to lean into the Lord's presence when your soul is disturbed within you?
- What are some reasons you are reluctant to pursue God's presence?
- Is it possible that you putting your focus and energies on any false hopes instead of putting your hope in God alone?
- Are there some areas of false hope that are readily apparent to you now? If so, name them:
- If you aren't aware of false hope: ask the HS to reveal anything or anyone that you are looking to for satisfaction this week and notice where you feel disappointment. Your words, actions, and energies also provide clues for you. Journal about any insights:
- Relational time in God's presence is directly correlated to our sense of hope and contentment, In light of this, explore the idea of reordering your priorities, Thoughts:
- How does this principle of hope coming from seeking God's face impact you? What thoughts and feelings does it stir inside? (Ex: anticipation, dread, desire, duty, other)
- Ask the Lord to give you some creative and personal ways to experience His presence on a more consistent basis: