

4 Tests to Determine if a Desire Is From God

My friend was sick with frustration. You could see it all over her face and hear it in her voice as she talked about unmet expectations at her church.

“You’re never satisfied,” remarked her husband. Unlike his wife, he was happy with their full-gospel church, and he felt fulfilled in the ways he was serving there. Everything was in place—a beautiful new building, committees ready for action, outreach efforts underway.

But for my friend and others at her church, there was still a deep sense of dissatisfaction. It wasn’t a rumbling, like complaining, but more a gnawing hunger for something more: the life-changing presence of the Holy Spirit.

I identified with my friend’s feelings; I had experienced them myself. Perhaps you have too. It may not be your church that leaves your spirit wanting; it may be your job. Or perhaps your marriage is missing something. Maybe your whole life feels empty!

Deep inside, you know there must be more, but your hope is drained when well-meaning friends try to offer biblical counsel, telling you to let go of your lofty expectations and learn to be content with what you’ve got.

But is this counsel truly biblical? My understanding is that it is not. Scripture does not declare all dissatisfaction to be a product of the flesh. Although we often use the words *satisfaction* and *contentment* interchangeably, they don’t mean the same thing, and confusing the two may alter the course of our lives.

Satisfaction vs. Contentment

In English, to be satisfied means to have your fill of what you desire, expect or need. Similarly, in the original Bible languages, numerous words translated *satisfy* imply a completion and a filling.

Contentment, on the other hand, refers to a sense of gladly accepting what is offered to you, knowing that more could be had, such as politely accepting a salad when you really wanted a steak. Webster's New World Dictionary defines it as being "happy with one's lot."

Sadly, some people believe the biblical charge of contentment is a mandate to relinquish all their unmet desires. But if we abandon every expectation for increase, we may do more than smother our hopes and dreams. We may immobilize God's perfect will in our lives by settling for less than what He has ordained for us to have and do.

Interestingly, most Scriptures that refer to contentment pertain to material wealth, not spiritual fulfillment. Consider the oft-quoted passage in 1 Timothy 6:6-7: "Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it" (NIV). Paul is referring here to the riches of this world and exhorting believers to value eternal things more.

Again, Paul writes, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty" (Phil. 4:11-12). Here he is discussing the support he has received from the Philippian church, pronouncing his reliance upon God for even his essential physical needs.

"Keep your lives free from the love of money," we are told in Hebrews 13:5, "and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'"

God's Word does command us to be content with our means. But when it comes to eternal matters of the heart—our walks with

God, relationships with others, finding meaning in life—God wants us to be filled to overflowing. When Scripture refers to our being satisfied, it's often in the context of hunger and thirst of the soul. "Blessed are you who hunger now," says Jesus, "'for you will be satisfied'" (Luke 6:21).

One summer day, our family went to the beach. While my husband went off to study a book under the shade, I waded along the shoreline with our 2-year-old daughter, Olivia, who was reluctant to go into water beyond her knees. As a mother, I was happy to play with her in the sand, watching her waddle around in the gentle waves. I was content!

The day grew hotter and hotter, though, and after a while the sizzling sun began to beat down on our heads. Eventually, splashing along the shore was no longer enough for me. Wading up to my knees wasn't invigorating. I felt as if I were melting, and I needed something more!

The deeper water was calling to me, and I was no longer content to do the "Mommy thing." I simply had to satisfy my body's need to cool off! As soon as my husband joined us and took over the responsibility of watching Olivia, I dove in deeper for a real swim. How refreshing that was! How satisfying!

I might have been content to cool off in an air-conditioned building rather than in the water, but leaving the beach without going into the water would not have satisfied me. I would have felt as if I had missed something wonderful.

Satisfaction Checklist

And so it is with your spirit. It's OK to be dissatisfied in your spiritual walk. That's what beckons you into the deeper waters God has for you.

"Come, all you who are thirsty," says the Word, "come to the

waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?" (Is. 55:1-2).

If you find yourself wanting more, don't assume there's something wrong. Stop to consider the nature of your yearning. It is possible to know whether the desires in your heart are of God or not.

How do you tell? How do you determine whether to let those desires go and be content or press on until your heart is truly satisfied?

1. Examine your motives. James warns us, "You desire but do not have. ... When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures" (James 4:2, 3). In light of biblical contentment, you must first search your heart to see if your desires have eternal significance.

Jesus, knowing that man's heart is easily enticed by earthly things, tells us to "store up ... treasures in heaven" (Matt. 6:20), not only because earthly things will pass away but also because He wants our hearts to be given totally to Him.

"Where your treasure is," He says, "there your heart will be also" (v. 21). Follow the trail to your treasure chest, and there you will find your heart.

2. Fear the Lord. "He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them" (Ps. 145:19). A healthy fear of God will make you humbly aware of your accountability to Him.

If your heart seems to be guiding you to do a new thing, first yield that desire to the Lord and see if He releases you to pursue it. Once He makes His leading clear, follow it—or satisfaction will continue to elude you.

3. Be diligent. “The sluggard’s appetite is never fulfilled, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied” (Prov. 13:4). You may have a godly desire in your heart, but don’t expect to simply wake up one morning and find yourself living your dream. You must birth it in prayer, ask the Holy Spirit what to do and then do it, whether it requires taking a baby step or a great leap of faith.

Sometimes there’s nothing you can do to achieve your desires except pray and wait on the Lord. But even then you must live in the present.

Look around you. What is your current sphere of influence? Can you find a way to serve God there with a glad heart?

If so, you will eventually hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!” (Matt. 25:21).

4. Continue to hope. “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life” (Prov. 13:12). If you are inclined to “just be content” in every area of your life, ask yourself if you have lost hope. Perhaps a renewed hope in the Lord would give you reason to press on until you can truly say your heart is satisfied.

It is His desire to give us this hope: “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart’” (Jer. 29:11-13).

In Oswald Chambers’ classic devotional *My Utmost for His Highest*, Chambers writes about vision becoming reality. “God gives us a vision, and then He takes us down to the valley to batter us into the shape of that vision,” he writes. “It is in the valley that so many of us give up and faint.”

Chambers explains that God inspires us with vision but does not entrust us with the reality of it until we have been molded to His likeness, as clay on the potter's wheel.

"But don't lose heart in the process," he writes. "If you ever had a vision from God, you may try as you will to be satisfied on a lower level, but God will never allow it."

My friend and the "hungry" people in her church refused to be content playing church. They pressed forth in prayer, and soon the church leadership recognized the need as well. They began to lead the congregation out to deeper waters of revival, raising the standard of their Christian experience.

Your inner craving for more, like my friend's, should be examined. If it's of God, your dissatisfaction can be used as a tool to propel you toward a more fulfilling life in the Lord. But if you ignore your pain until you've gone numb, you may be lulled into settling for a mediocre existence, even in the things that really matter.

"Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love," wrote David, "that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days" (Ps. 90:14). In the end, the secret of satisfaction is knowing that whatever longing we feel begins and ends with Jesus, for He alone truly satisfies our souls.

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