

# Chasing Happiness vs Finding Contentment

Christian Life in a Culture of Grumbling

# Introduction

- Why is happiness or contentment so elusive?
- The Bible says contentment is possible today:
- “I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want” (Phil 4:12)
- What would make Singaporeans happy?

# What Makes Singaporeans Happy?

- <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/2022>
- **Individual and social factors**
- **Purpose and perseverance:** Having a strong sense of purpose and persevering towards long-term goals are significant contributors to individual happiness
- **Social connections:** Strong social support networks and meaningful relationships are key drivers of well-being, often more so than material wealth
- **Family and traditions:** Prioritizing family and traditions is linked to greater life satisfaction

# What Makes Singaporeans Happy?

- **Environmental and structural factors**
- **Public safety:** A sense of public safety and security is a top contributor to happiness
- **Transportation and housing:** Good transportation and housing conditions are also significant factors
- **Economic stability:** While household income is a factor, the pursuit of material possessions is linked to lower happiness. Happiness is more likely to be found in having a balance rather than over-emphasizing material wealth

# What Makes Singaporeans Happy?

- **Factors Contributing to happiness**
- **Shift focus:** A more mindful approach that prioritizes experiences over material goods can lead to greater happiness
- **Cultivate relationships:** Instead of chasing material possessions, investing in meaningful relationships is more likely to have a profound impact on overall well-being
- **Find purpose:** Look for a sense of purpose and a healthy work-life balance to improve overall life satisfaction

# Working Definition

“Contentment is the inward gracious quiet spirit that joyfully rests in God’s providence”

## **Jeremiah Burroughs (1599-1646)**

In the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, at a time when Puritan pastors were seeking the on-going reform of the church in England, feelings of discontent, bitterness and anger at their treatment by the established church must have been significant temptations

Jeremiah Burroughs was educated at Emmanuel College Cambridge. As a pastor, he was expelled for being a non-conformist. He served briefly in various churches in England. During the persecutions of the Puritan parties, he spent time in exile serving the church in Rotterdam

Later returning to England preaching in the city of London, Burroughs became one of the theological architects of the *Westminster Confession*. He worked tirelessly to promote unity amongst the various reforming parties both inside and outside the Church of England

# The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment



PURITAN PAPERBACKS □ JEREMIAH BURROUGHS

# Inward

- Contentment does not depend on external circumstances
- It is an inward disposition experienced from the inside out
- <sup>23</sup> After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. <sup>24</sup> When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. <sup>25</sup> About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them (Acts 16:23-25)

# Quiet

- Grumbling is a seriously sin because it means we distrust in God's sovereign rule in our lives
- <sup>10</sup> Jesus called the crowd to him and said, Listen and understand. <sup>11</sup> What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them (Matt 15:10-11)
- Jesus tells the crowd that what defiles a person is not what enters their mouth, but what comes out of their mouth, because what comes from the heart is what is truly unclean

# Quiet

- <sup>2</sup> In the desert the whole community **grumbled** against Moses and Aaron. <sup>3</sup> The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death (Ex 16:2-3)
- <sup>6</sup> So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt, <sup>7</sup> and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your **grumbling** against him. Who are we, that you should **grumble** against us?” <sup>8</sup> Moses also said, “You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your **grumbling** against him. Who are we? You are not **grumbling** against us, but against the LORD (Ex 16:6-8)

# Quiet

- That night all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. <sup>2</sup> All the Israelites **grumbled** against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, “If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! <sup>3</sup> Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?” <sup>4</sup> And they said to each other, “We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt (Num 14:1-4)
- <sup>11</sup> The LORD said to Moses, “How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them? <sup>12</sup> I will strike them down with (Num 14:11-12)

# Quiet

- <sup>12</sup> Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. <sup>14</sup> Do everything without **grumbling** or arguing, <sup>15</sup> so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky <sup>16</sup> as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain (Phil 2:12-16)

# Gracious

- Contentment is the work of God in the heart. Paul says “I have learned the secret of being content”
- <sup>11</sup> I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be **content** whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup> I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being **content** in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup> I can do all this through him who gives me strength (Phil 4:11-13)

# Rests in God's Providence

- God is not disconnected from the world today
- There is no such thing as chance, fate, accident, or luck
- God is in control
- He upholds, sustains, and governs all things from his own hands

# The Way of the Righteous

- Ps 1 presents the blessed (happy) person as one rooted in God's word
- He is the one who meditates on God's word day and night
- Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, <sup>2</sup> but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. <sup>3</sup> That person is like tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers (Ps 1:1-3)
- The key to success is stay rooted in God's word "like tree"

# The Way of the Righteous

- True happiness is found inside of us, where our roots are planted
- Happiness is not what happens to you but what you are
- Happiness is not found directly, but is a byproduct of seeking God's righteousness
- The Psalmist does not ask how can I be happy?
- Rather, he asks what am I living for?

# Seek God and His Kingdom

- <sup>28</sup> And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. <sup>29</sup> Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ <sup>32</sup> For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. <sup>33</sup> But **seek first his kingdom and his righteousness**, and all these things will be given to you as well. <sup>34</sup> Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own (Matt 6:28-34)