

PREVIEW

*"This book will guide you to a deeper faith
in the gospel and a richer experience of contentment."*

—R. ALBERT MOHLER JR.

THE POWER *of* CHRISTIAN CONTENTMENT

FINDING DEEPER, RICHER
CHRIST-CENTERED JOY



ANDREW M. DAVIS

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deeper faith in the gospel and a richer experience of contentment and hope in God's providence."

R. Albert Mohler Jr., president, Southern Baptist
Theological Seminary

"Years ago I was profoundly impacted in reading Jeremiah Burroughs's *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*. It felt like I was being discipled in a major dimension of the Christian life I had barely heard about by a Christian from another generation. Burroughs is truly among the best of the Puritan writers. I was even more excited when I saw that Andy, a thoughtful pastor, profound thinker, and great communicator, had taken up the task of reexpressing this essential and powerful Christian truth for a contemporary audience. If there was ever a time a distracted and exhausted church needed this message, it is today. Burroughs's book became a classic for a reason. I think Andy's book will become a classic for the same."

J. D. Greear, pastor, The Summit Church, Raleigh-Durham, NC; president, Southern Baptist Convention

"I had never heard of the Puritan pastor Jeremiah Burroughs or his work *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* until I was asked to read this book by Andy Davis. That was my loss. Drawing upon this superb treatise and Scripture—in particular, the apostle Paul—pastor Davis leads us on a fruitful journey into the delights and blessings of finding true contentment in Christ. There is joy immeasurable to be found in Christ, and this book will help you find it."

Daniel L. Akin, president, Southeastern Baptist
Theological Seminary

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“Andy has put his finger squarely on one of the biggest issues society faces today: we live in an age of discontent. I’m not talking about impatience or shrinking attention spans. There is a deeper, underlying ache in growing numbers of people that speaks to dissatisfaction and a resignation that life is not what it should be and that more is never enough. This problem plagues Christians and non-Christians alike, but for the believer, things can and should be different. Andy unlocks the keys to Christ-centered contentment and how we can align our desires with God’s. Every believer will benefit from studying the principles and practices shared here.”

Kevin Ezell, president, North American Mission Board,
Southern Baptist Convention

“I recommend everything Andy Davis has written. He is one of the godliest men I know. He not only believes what he writes; he also lives it. Both biblical teaching and personal experience flow from every page of this helpful, insightful, convicting, encouraging, and edifying book. I enthusiastically recommend it to everyone reading these words. It will deepen your relationship with Christ, increase your faith in a good and sovereign God, sweeten your sorrows, and put fresh resolve in your steps toward heaven. That’s quite a claim, but I’m sure of it. You’ll seldom read a more timely book than this one.”

Donald S. Whitney, professor of biblical spirituality and
associate dean, School of Theology, Southern Baptist
Theological Seminary; author of *Spiritual Disciplines
for the Christian Life* and *Praying the Bible*

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“Sooner or later everyone asks, Is there anything more to life? In this book, pastor Andrew Davis shows why. In vivid narrative and clear teaching, this book shows us the roots of our chronic discontent, no matter what we have or don’t have, and then points us to the solution. If you think this book is a ‘stop whining and be grateful’ scold, you are quite wrong. Instead, this book shows us how to find contentment and, with it, something beyond contentment, joy. If you, like me, wrestle with discontent, then you will be glad you found this book.”

Russell Moore, president, The Ethics & Religious Liberty
Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention

“A gifted teacher explains, illustrates, and applies. Andy Davis is an incredibly gifted teacher who has given the church a ‘jewel’ with this book. Davis’s treatment of contentment has challenged and encouraged my soul. It will yours as well.”

Timothy K. Beougher, Billy Graham Professor of Evangelism
and Church Growth and associate dean, Billy Graham School
of Missions, Evangelism and Ministry, Southern
Baptist Theological Seminary

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A RARE JEWEL IN A DISCONTENTED WORLD

The stone had been formed in the depths of the earth centuries before it was found, transformed from worthless carbon by unimaginable temperatures and pressures. It had been driven to the surface of the earth by tectonic forces and had made its way down various tributary streams until it came to rest at the edge of the Abaetezinho River in Brazil. No one could know how long it was there, unrecognizable, covered with mud and sand. It looked like any ordinary stone, but it was precious beyond words. In 1990, a Brazilian farmer needed some water for his fields and stooped down to get it. The stone somehow caught his eye, and he scooped it up, dripping and dirty. There's no way the farmer could have known that he had just discovered the largest red diamond in history—13.9 carats in its rough form. All diamonds are rare, but red diamonds are the rarest of them all. That red diamond would eventually be cut into a triangular shape

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The Secret of Contentment

weighing 5.11 carats. It is now known as the Moussaieff Red Diamond, after the collector who purchased it in 2001. Its sale price was undisclosed, but estimates put its value as high as \$8 million.¹

This amazing red diamond is exceedingly precious. An immeasurably more precious jewel to the Christian is *contentment*. In 1642, the Puritan pastor Jeremiah Burroughs preached a series of sermons on Christian contentment that were gathered and published in 1648, two years after his death. The title the editors chose was *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*. It carries the reader through a powerful unfolding of this vital topic, beginning with the apostle Paul's assertion in Philippians 4:12, "In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content" (CSB). Unfortunately, many Christians in the twenty-first century have never delved into the topic of contentment. Like the muddy rock scooped up from the bank of a Brazilian river, its true worth has been hidden from many eyes for centuries. I desire that more and more Christians would experience the kind of Christian contentment that Paul discovered and Burroughs so skillfully described. Its worth in eternity will prove far greater than that of the red diamond.

Why do I say that? Consider this hypothetical scenario: Imagine you just won the most extraordinary sweepstakes prize ever, but it came through supernatural means. Let's call it the "Faustian Travel Agency," owned and operated by a Mr. Mephistopheles.² The prize is a two-week all-expense-paid trip anywhere in the world. You will stay at the most expensive five-star hotels, eat the highest-quality food, cooked by the best chefs in the world. You will see the most spectacular scenery, drive the most expensive cars, and wear a whole new

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A Rare Jewel in a Discontented World

wardrobe specifically tailored for you. The trip will have the best of everything and will cater to your every whim.

But here's the catch: you would have to agree to be continually discontent at every moment of the trip. Would you do it? Two weeks of constant discontentment in the most luxurious setting possible? For many people, I think the answer might be pretty clear: "No way! Why would I want to be miserable for two straight weeks?" Actually, we see many of the world's most elite people essentially living out this kind of tragedy in real life—famous athletes and movie stars, living in spectacular mansions on their own private estates on rocky coastlines, with architectural plans that maximize the view of the sunrise or sunset over the ocean, yet tragically discontent, going from divorce to divorce, addicted to drugs, bored, even suicidal.

Conversely, suppose a different offer were made to you, this one by your heavenly Father. He is offering a painful trial of suffering. You will be publicly beaten, imprisoned in a gloomy dungeon with your feet in stocks. You will be deprived of food, water, medical care, and even light. Surrounding you will be other suffering prisoners, the stench of human bodily fluids, and the kind of despair that comes when the end of your agony isn't in sight. *But* you will also be filled with such a supernatural contentment through the presence of God that you will later remember it as one of the sweetest times of your life. And you will have the privilege of leading a whole family to Christ (see Acts 16:16–34).

Which offer would you take? If you are a Christian, it is possible you would choose the second experience, despite its high cost. And if so, you probably already agree that contentment is the greatest state of inner well-being one could ever

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The Secret of Contentment

have in this world. The value of contentment is vastly greater than any that the red diamond could bring. Yet despite the value of this rich, full, continual contentment, and despite the fact that it is possible for every Christian in the world to experience it, this exquisite jewel is rare in our lives. And how desperately the unsaved world needs Christians to discover it.

In this tragic world, we are surrounded by discontented people. Every minute of the day, it is possible to see evidence of this restless discontentment in the way people respond to circumstances. People show their discontent while driving, because the traffic is too slow. Or perhaps the weather is too hot, too rainy, or too humid. Or in their jobs people aren't making enough money or receiving enough credit for the hard work they are putting in. Or they can't stand their coworkers. People feel deeply disappointed with their marriage or with how their children are turning out. Their bodies are too fat or not beautiful enough. Mired in their discontent, people often buy things they don't really need to improve their outlook on life. People try to find their way into happiness by seeking healing from counselors for their dysfunctional childhoods. Discontent with the love they haven't found shows up in lustfully roving eyes at office parties. Their outlooks darken as they take the commuter rail to another day at the same jobs that have imprisoned them for years.

The restless discontent of the world of non-Christians will not surprise many believers who have sought to win them to Christ. We realize Scripture reveals the true spiritual condition of the lost: they are "without hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12 CSB). They are "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt. 9:36). Their enslavement to invisible powers of darkness (Eph. 2:1-3)

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A Rare Jewel in a Discontented World

means that they share with Satan and the demons the same restlessness that causes them to roam the earth, constantly seeking some kind of rest but finding none (Job 1:7; Matt. 12:43). The spiritual condition of the lost and their bondage to sin guarantees that they can never find true rest and peace, which are essential to genuine contentment. Isaiah put it plainly: “The wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up mire and dirt. There is no peace,” says my God, ‘for the wicked’” (57:20–21).

This churning discontentment of unbelievers explains a lot of the terrible events that happen on planet Earth. Powerful rulers, discontent with the size of their domains, move out in greedy conquest, leaving a bloody trail of death and destruction across the pages of history. Every crime that rips apart the fabric of society comes from discontent people who are addicted to drugs, alcohol, money, power, or sensual pleasure and are willing to destroy other people’s lives to get what their restless souls are demanding. Every marriage that ends in divorce begins that tragic journey in a heart of discontent. Though we cannot say that every misery in this world begins with human discontent, we may safely say that all the suffering of the world is exponentially intensified by the failure to find genuine contentment in the midst of any and every circumstance.

As Christians, we should be surprised by none of this diagnosis of the unbelieving world. But the great tragedy is that so often we don’t really seem to live much differently. Many Christians hardly ever experience the daily foretaste of heaven that the Holy Spirit lives within us to provide (Eph. 1:13). Many display high levels of discontentment in all the same circumstances that I just listed, and in countless others.

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The Secret of Contentment

Many of us Christians are restless, searching for something of value in our lives and not finding it. Many are spiritually immature, unable to handle even the smallest afflictions and inconveniences without verbalizing our complaints to whomever will listen. Many Christians live such discontent lives that they are never asked by any of the similarly discontent unbelievers surrounding them to give a reason for the hope that they have (1 Pet. 3:15), because they don't evidently have any hope.

What makes this all the more amazing is that, for over two and a half centuries, developments in science, industry, the economy, and medicine have steadily and systematically reduced the physical miseries common to every preceding generation of humanity. The Industrial Revolution brought astonishing technological progress to the world, resulting in labor-saving devices, new sources of power, amazing advances in transportation, indoor plumbing, and houses wired for electricity. Heating and air-conditioning regulate the temperature that surrounds us at nearly every moment. Refrigerators enable us to keep perishable items fresher longer, and delivery systems from the farmland to our homes ensure that a constant stream of delicious and affordable foods will keep our families eating like royalty. Medical researchers never stop searching for remedies to ailments and diseases that make life so miserable. And we have a clear expectation that someone somewhere is applying technological genius to remove every painful affliction from daily life. We say, "If we can put a man on the moon, surely we can cure the common cold!" The digital revolution has been a miracle of modern science, and our amazing little smartphones bring the entire world to our hands instantaneously.

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NOTES

Chapter 1 A Rare Jewel in a Discontented World

1. “Moussaieff Red,” Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, accessed July 30, 2018, <https://geogallery.si.edu/10026485/moussaieff-red>.

2. This refers to *Doctor Faustus* (1604) by Christopher Marlowe. Mephistopheles is a Satan-like figure who makes a deal for the soul of Dr. Faustus. Many times people in our age speak of someone “selling his soul to the devil” for some earthly benefit. The devil tricks the individual into some arrangement that he later bitterly regrets.

3. Gregg Easterbrook, *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse* (Chicago: Random House, 2004).

Chapter 2 Paul Teaches the Secret of Christian Contentment

1. The word is *autarkēs*, from *autos* (self) and *arkeō* (to be enough or sufficient).

2. Italics that appear in Scripture quotations have been added for emphasis.

3. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 160.

4. John Piper, “I Believe in God’s Self-Sufficiency,” *Trinity Journal*, n.s., 29 (2008): 227–28.

5. C. S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” *Theology*, November 1941, <http://www.verber.com/mark/xian/weight-of-glory.pdf>.

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A new great message

"If there was ever a time a distracted and exhausted church needed this message, it is today."

—J. D. GREER, pastor, The Summit Church,
Raleigh-Durham, NC; president, Southern Baptist Convention

In 1643, Puritan pastor Jeremiah Burroughs wrote a work titled *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* that has as much resonance in our discontented day as it did in his. Now pastor and author Andrew M. Davis helps us rediscover the remarkable truths found in this largely forgotten work. With powerful new illustrations and a keen sense of all that makes modern Christians restless, Davis challenges us to confront the sources of discontent in our lives and embrace Paul's teaching on contentment in all circumstances.

"While the world, including many Christians, chases the siren song of happiness and fulfillment in culture, Andrew Davis reminds us what the apostle Paul taught us: true contentment can only be found in Christ. This book is powerful. It is needed. And it is so biblically relevant in a world that desperately needs this message."

—THOM RAINER, president and CEO, Church Answers;
author of *I Am a Church Member*, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, and *Simple Church*


"In a world characterized by so much discontent, some of it serious and some of it laughably trivial, the virtue of contentment is a rare treasure. This is a book to savor and reread, and then pass on to others."

—D. A. CARSON, research professor of New Testament,
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

"Let this book guide you to a deeper faith in the gospel and a richer experience of contentment and hope in God's providence."

—R. ALBERT MOHLER JR., president, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

ANDREW M. DAVIS is pastor of First Baptist Church of Durham, North Carolina, and a visiting professor of church history at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Chairman of the governance committee of The Gospel Coalition, Davis has written articles for TGC's popular website and has spoken in plenary and breakout sessions at TGC's national conference. He is the author of *Revitalize* and *An Infinite Journey*, named by Tim Challies as one of the top ten books of 2014.

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