

# Divine Discontentment

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I once heard a preacher visiting our church say, "I am here to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable!" I believe these two principles of comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable reflect much of what our Lord tries to do to us by His Holy Spirit.

There is a desire in the human heart and spirit to live a contented life. For those not born again, the focus of their search for contentment is the world and what it has to offer. But for those of us who are born again, our spirits yearn to live our lives in divine contentment. *I define divine contentment as having God's peace in your spirit regardless of your circumstances.* Paul referred to this same principle when he said:

I am not saying this because I am in need, for 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. 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. I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (Phi 4:11-13 NIV)

Because God created us, He knows that discontentment can be a powerful motivating force in our lives. The Lord made us to be discontent in our innermost beings until we are moving in the center of His will for our lives and our ministries. But He also knows that we human beings dislike change. So the Lord uses divine discontentment within our very souls and spirits to stir us to action when He has something new or different for us.

What is this thing I am calling *divine discontentment*? I define it as *God agitating our spirits to stir us to action or to make a change of some kind.* He can do this regardless of our circumstances. By that I mean that even when we like our current circumstances and we are comfortable with life God can plant His discontentment in our spirits.

## Two Kinds of Discontentment

I see two kinds of discontentment. The first is personal discontentment. By this I mean we become dissatisfied with our own life or our own circumstances. I call this type of force for change as *self-motivated discontentment*. Then there is the second kind of discontentment. I call this *other-motivated discontentment*. This is when God focuses our discontentment of the plight of others. Two wonderful examples we have of this in the twentieth century are Ghandi of India and Nelson Mandela of South Africa. Both of these men were motivated to bring about drastic changes in their societies by what they saw as injustices to their fellow countrymen.

## Discontentment Has Three Sources

**Self** - I believe there are three sources of discontentment. The first source of discontentment is from within ourselves. It is our own fleshly desire to promote ourselves. We can be driven by our pride, our ambition, our desire for increased status, our desire to have more things, or whatever. If we allow our flesh to drive us, we will never be content and we will certainly never experience God's contentment. Why? Because even when we reach one goal and experience a momentary high, it will quickly evaporate as we begin to focus on the next thing we want to make us happy. If I live my life always trying to promote me, there will be no pedestal high enough to satisfy me.

There is a second way that we can bring on self-discontentment. That is by us making stupid choices for our lives. As we make wilfully bad or careless choices in life, we will eventually end up discontent with our circumstances. If we get stuck in these hard places, God can still bring about His divine contentment and give us the grace to carry on.

**The Enemy** - The second source of inner discontentment comes from the enemy of our soul. Like God, the devil also knows that discontentment can be a powerful motivating tool. But for the demonic forces arrayed against us, their purpose is to harm us. Remember, the devil comes to rob, kill and destroy. (Jn 10:10)

It is easy to see the enemy operating in those who are not born again. Their discontentment seems to be always present. But the enemy targets believers too. If he can make us discontent with living our lives according to Godly principles and conforming to God's word, then he wins. An example of this is when a godly husband with a good wife of 25 years begins to become discontent with her. He secretly starts to think that his life would be better without her. Remember, the enemy rides our flesh. Mariam's song in Exodus 15:21 refers to the horse and the rider being thrown into the sea. The horse is our flesh, the rider is the devil. This is a deadly combination and is always destructive to our lives and to the lives of those we touch if we allow these thoughts to take over our minds and bend our wills to them.

The enemy also tries to plant discontentment in us about our ministries. He is always trying to get us to compare ourselves with other ministries or ministers who may appear to be more "successful" than we are! If we let him succeed, even if we continue in our call, we are allowing ourselves to be robbed of that divine contentment Paul talks about.

I believe it is this kind of demonically driven discontentment that leads to so much destruction and sorrow in this world. We see it on a personal level, within families, churches, communities, and even whole nations. It is this enemy driven personal dissatisfaction that stirs up the horrible violence we see in race riots and tribal wars. This mindless

hatred of others whom we don't even know is the very antithesis of all that God has for His people and, indeed, for the human race.

**God** - The third source of human discontentment is from God Himself, through the Holy Spirit. Remember, God often wants to afflict the comfortable. I believe God is after our comfort zone when He begins to stir us with an inner dissatisfaction. He can be after some movement in our own personal lives or He may want us to become discontent about the plight of others.

### **Divine Discontentment with Self**

The first example I think of in this self-discontentment arena is when someone is called to ministry but has simply not moved into it. We know that the call of God on our lives is irrevocable. It is there for our lifetime. If we don't move into that call, the Lord simply allows us (or even causes us) to become more and more dissatisfied with what we are doing (or not doing) with our life. The Lord will allow this condition to continue until we are willing and even eager to bring about any change necessary to get rid of this inner discontentment.

The second example I think of in the area of self-discontentment can occur even when we are already moving in our ministry. If the Lord wants us to move on to something else or change the focus of our ministry, He will stir up discontentment within us. Maybe we have stayed too long in one place and God wants to raise up others to do the work we are doing. He wants us to expand our current vision beyond our local community. There can be any number of things the Lord is after in us as we sense this dissatisfaction.

Interestingly, this discontentment can arise even when our ministry is growing and doing well by the church's standards. Or, conversely, the Lord can simply let (or even cause) our ministry to decline until we are so discontent we will seriously seek Him for what is really going on and not simply continue to ask Him to prosper our work. If He is wanting to change our work, no matter how hard we pray, no matter how hungry we get from fasting, nothing will change until He gets our attention and can speak to us.

### **Divine Discontentment About Others**

The Lord also uses this divine discontentment in our spirits when He wants us to do something about the plight of others. One of the best examples of this is Nehemiah. When Nehemiah heard the following he was overcome with sorrow.

The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire." When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. (Neh 1:1-4 NIV)

Thus the Lord birthed discontentment in Nehemiah's heart when he heard about the situation in Jerusalem. His first reaction was to mourn, fast, and pray. Then he became a force against the *status quo*. He felt compelled to do something. (Notice that other people who knew the same facts were not stirred to action.) Nehemiah determined that he had to speak to the king. He prayed,

"... O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man." I was cupbearer to the king. (Neh 1:11NIV)

### **What Should We Do If We Feel Discontented?**

Let me say right now that the worst thing we can do with that feeling of discontentment is to do nothing! If we don't respond to it, eventually the Holy Spirit will withdraw, at least for a season, and we will become complacent. I know some Christians who, from all outward circumstances, appear to be content in horrible spiritual situations. Why are they not disturbed? I think they have allowed any discontentment or dissatisfaction to degenerate into complacency. By complacency I mean self-satisfied or even smug with no intention of changing.

But worse yet, Christians can allow that unacted upon discontentment to turn them into complainers and/or criticizers. They remind me of an old story about a man who had a lazy dog. His neighbor stopped by his house one day and the dog was laying by the front door just howling and barking. The neighbor asked the man what was wrong with the dog? "Oh, he's just laying on a thorn and is too lazy to get up and move!" replied the man. I think a lot of us Christians are like that dog. We are unhappy but we're too lazy to do anything about it, so we just complain and criticize!

### **Take Our Discontentment to The Lord**

Whenever we are aware of any discontentment or dissatisfaction within our souls and spirits, we should do exactly what Nehemiah did. We should make it a matter of serious prayer before the Lord. Why? Because the first thing we need to find out is the source of the discontentment. Is it our own flesh, or is it the enemy (or a combination of both), or is it from God? If it is from any source other than God, then we need to get rid of it immediately by any means necessary.

### **Fast and Pray**

Fasting and prayer are always in order in dealing with an inner discontentment. As I said, determining its source is extremely important. But suppose you have sought the Lord and He has made it clear to you that He is the source of your discontentment. Do you quit fasting and praying now? Absolutely not! Why? Because now you are in a position to begin to seek the Lord to find out what He wants you to do.

Nehemiah fasted and prayed prior to his appearing before the king. He knew he had to have the mind of the Lord in what he was to do. He also needed God's favor as he went to the king with his burden. I believe that Nehemiah's fasting,

praying, and obedience gave God the liberty to soften the king's heart and make him compassionate towards the Jews' plight in Jerusalem. But Nehemiah wasn't done when he talked to the king about the situation in Jerusalem. The Lord was stirring him to more action.

### **Seek God's Plan**

When the Lord stirs up that divine discontentment that leads to change, it is critical that we get the Lord's new plan. So often if we have an inner dissatisfaction we want to just run with it. Don't do that! Take the time needed to wait on the Lord. He always blesses *His plans*.

Let's continue looking at Nehemiah and the plan that the Lord gave him.

I also said to him, "If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah? And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king's forest, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?" And because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my requests. So I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king's letters. The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me. (Neh 2:7-9 NIV)

When Nehemiah got to Jerusalem he continued with his God given, very practical plan.

By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate. (Neh 2:13-15 NIV)

### **There Will Always Be a Risk Involved When We Act**

Let's suppose that we have now recognized that the discontentment within our spirits is from the Lord and that He has told us what to do, or at least the first steps. Let me make it clear right here that there is always at least some risk involved when we begin to change directions or reach out in a new ministry. In the early stages of our effort our steps will probably be shaky because we can't see the end. We only know that the old is going and something new is beginning to take its place. Let's look again at Nehemiah. He knew he risked being executed by the king when he told him about his burden. So he was risking his very life by his actions.

In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before; so the king asked me, "Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart." *I was very much afraid*, but I said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face

not look sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?" The king said to me, "What is it you want?" Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, "If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it." Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, "How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?" It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time. (Neh 2:1-6 NIV, emphasis added.)

Nehemiah took a huge risk in approaching the king but the payoff was huge too. God never lets us down when we are doing His will!

### **You Won't Be Alone**

In my experience God almost always stirs up His divine discontentment in more than one person at a time. This mutual dissatisfaction of spirit can be between husband and wife or within an entire family. It can also be among friends or fellow ministers. How often do we hear of instances where the Holy Spirit is quietly speaking to several people at the same time about something but they don't even know about each other. Then when they begin to share their discontent they find that the Lord has birthed His new vision in others as well as themselves. The Lord does not want to leave us without support of any kind. We can and should take great comfort in how faithful God is to put others on our team to accomplish His will. See what happened to Nehemiah.

The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work. Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me. *They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work.* (Neh 2:16-18 NIV, emphasis added.)

The Jews continued the rebuilding until the mission was complete!

### **There Will Always Be Opposition When We Act**

More bad news! Not only will there be certain risks involved when we begin to act but we can be absolutely sure there will also be opposition to our efforts. This opposition can come from other people or from demonic beings, or a combination of both. Nehemiah had to deal with Sanballat and Tobias who did everything they could to defeat his efforts to rebuild Jerusalem.

But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. "What is this you are doing?" they asked. "Are you rebelling against the king?" (Neh 2:19 NIV)

In fact, as the work progressed, the workers became targets of those who were against the changes being made in Jerusalem. What was Nehemiah's response? He took precautions to protect his workers and kept on with the mission!

So we continued the work with half the men holding spears, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out. At that time I also said to the people, "Have every man and his helper stay inside Jerusalem at night, so they can serve us as guards by night and workmen by day." (Neh 4:21-22 NIV)

Finally, notice that even after Jerusalem had been rebuilt the opposition still continued. Nehemiah went back to the king's court. Later, when he returned to Jerusalem, he ran into some of those same men who were still trying to undermine what Nehemiah had instructed be done. So Nehemiah had to once again oppose them to set things in order.

I have used just this one example of Nehemiah to illustrate how God instills in us His divine discontentment to accomplish His goals and purposes. Much of Paul's writings reflect his divine discontentment with the state of the churches he founded. David and many of his men in Adullam's cave also literally changed the course of the history of Israel based upon their divine discontentment. And every one of the Old Testament prophets experienced this divine discontentment which stirred them to action.

### **Be Purpose Driven**

The wonderful news in all this is that if we walk according to God's direction, we will accomplish His purposes. *We will find that our divine discontentment evolves into obedience. Then, once we begin to obey our Lord's new directives, He will add resolve to our actions and our mind set. We will become like granite rock, absolutely unyielding to any kind of opposition. We will be more willing to take whatever risks are necessary to move in this new direction.*

Why does God chose certain people and instill in them His divine discontentment? He looks into the heart. He is looking for strong people who will do His will even in the face of risks and opposition. When God makes us divinely

discontent, it is a witness of God that we have what it takes to make a change with His help. And Paul reminds us of that wonderful promise, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." (Phi 4:13 NIV)

We also know that God will accomplish His will. That is not in question. The only question is will we be a part of it when it happens? Let's end this teaching by reading about the wonderful celebration Nehemiah and the Israelites had upon the completion of rebuilding the wall.

I had the leaders of Judah go up on top of the wall. I also assigned two large choirs to give thanks. . . . (Neh 12:31a NIV)

The two choirs that gave thanks then took their places in the house of God; so did I, together with half the officials, as well as the priests . . . . And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away. (Neh 12:40, 43 NIV)

### **Our Prayer**

Thank you, Lord, for that wonderful divine discontentment you plant in our hearts and spirits from time to time. Help us always to be sensitive to your Holy Spirit when you are moving us in a new direction or doing a new thing with us or the ministry you have given us. Lord, as we move out in obedience, give us the resolve and favor we need to complete Your work. And in all we do, may the name of Jesus Christ our Lord be glorified! Amen.

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