

# YOU CAN FIND CONTENTMENT IN 2022

**6 NUDGES TOWARD A LIFE OF  
BIBLICAL CONTENTMENT**

**GEORGE G WATTS**

# **YOU CAN FIND CONTENTMENT IN 2022: 6 NUDGES TOWARD A LIFE OF BIBLICAL CONTENTMENT**

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<b>WHAT IS EVEN GOING ON?</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>LIFE IS HARD</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>DISSATISFACTION</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>ENTITLEMENT</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>GREED</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>FEAR</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>APATHY</b>	<b>22</b>

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# WHAT IS EVEN GOING ON?

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Let's face it, last year was not exactly a banner year. For a lot of us, it was only decent if compared to 2020. And this year does not look to be off to a great start.

Pandemic. (again.... still)

Systemic Racism.

That guy at work.

Family issues.

Health concerns.

Climate change.

The car won't start.

Economic injustice.

Phone battery just won't hold a charge.

Pretty quickly, the world seems pretty hopeless. Happiness is scarce. Satisfaction is not exactly dripping from every new day.

But what if you could live in a way where the hope came back? A way where happiness and satisfaction was not the goal anyway? What if we return contentment to its rightful place in the mind, heart, and soul?

On the following pages, you will see six obstacles that keep us from contentment.

These are the *Troubles*.

But in response to each, you have a biblical reality. Something you maybe know to be true, but have a hard time really believing, or living out.

These are the *Truths*.

That's the structure of each of the following six prompts:

**TROUBLE**

followed by

**TRUTH**

It's not about trying harder, it's not about being better, or gritting your teeth to make it through. The reality is Biblical contentment is a gift. It's something God has for each of us. It's not something we do, but something we accept. This book is NOT "6 Easy Steps to Making Yourself Content" - as if that were even possible. It's more like "6 ways this world robs us of God's gift of contentment."

I hope this short book helps you live the reality of contentment this year more than ever before.



# LIFE IS HARD

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## **TROUBLE:** **THINGS ARE PRETTY TOUGH FOR ME RIGHT NOW**

*My business is sinking, our marriage is on life support, the kids are struggling, and another COVID wave... how can I be content?*

## **TRUTH:** **CONTENTMENT DOES NOT DEPEND ON CIRCUMSTANCES**

Imagine the Apostle Paul, sitting in Rome as a prisoner of the Empire. He's been beaten and ship-wrecked, arrested and mocked. However, look carefully at what he says: 'I have learned to be content no matter what. But only because of the strength I have found in Jesus.'

Paul doesn't need monetary wealth to be happy, but having money won't keep him from being happy either. It's not the having or not that's the issue. He has learned God is all he needs.

# **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 ALL THIS THROUGH HIM WHO GIVES ME STRENGTH. PHILIPPIANS 4:4-13**

When we are content with our present state, whatever it is, at our core we are content with God. If God is all we have, is that still enough? If we have a bunch of bad things, but also still God, will that do? If we can only be content with God plus something else, what does that say about our belief that God really is sufficient?

What if God actually expects you to change your attitude toward your life, even if He doesn't change the circumstances of your life? What if God expects you to be content, even though from the outside it looks like you shouldn't or couldn't be?

This *contentment in all circumstances* has a different perspective on life. It comes from a submission to God that says, "OK, this doesn't look good from my perspective - and I have no idea what you're doing here God. However, I trust you are good, and you are in control - and if both those things are true - I can be content."

The actual basis of contentment is holding these two truths - about God's goodness and His power - at the same time. Most people will agree God is good, and some agree He is in control. But to really believe God is both ultimately in control, and is the ultimate good is much harder when life gets tough. This is why submitting to God during difficult times is key to finding

contentment. We admit we are not in control and we also don't have the ultimate understanding of good.

Contentment comes from a sense that this world is not my home, but I am a loved child of God, and I am confident he will somehow meet my needs. Conversely, if I'm 'content' only because I'm doing fine, am I going to be crushed as soon as something goes wrong because I'm scared my entire life will begin to unravel?

True contentment is not looking around to weigh the good and the bad of our situation and decide if it warrants a contented outlook or not. Contentment is believing - no matter what things look like - God is in control. Only then can we have peace and hope for the future.

Perhaps also our timeline is the problem. If we look only to this world and our time-frame is book-ended by this life, there is little reason for contentment. When we forget God is above this world, as well as in it, it's disconcerting and even depressing. If, however, we can manage even a small glimpse into eternity, things look different.

The **trouble** is that life really is hard, and what you're going through right now very well might not lead to contentment. The **truth** is that God is present with you no matter what. He will never leave you or forsake you, and even though circumstances will change, He won't.

# DISSATISFACTION

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## TROUBLE: SATISFACTION SEEMS UNREASONABLE

*I long for a sense of satisfaction in what I do, but I just can't get there. At this point, I'm not even sure it's even possible.*

## TRUTH: YES, IT DOES.

One reason we cannot keep, or even find contentment, is we have confused it with satisfaction. This may seem like a nit-picky point - as even some English thesauruses (thesauri?) equate the words *contentment* and *satisfaction*. However, there is a meaningful difference from a Biblical perspective.

Jeremiah Burroughs, a 16th century English pastor, had something very direct to say on this matter. He claimed that someone who has Biblical contentment, “is the most contented man in the world, and yet the most unsatisfied man in the world.”

Let that sink in.

Burroughs argues contentment is not only different from, but the opposite of satisfaction. The two are mutually exclusive.

Let's be clear on what satisfaction is. It's simply when all our expectations are met. “Were you satisfied with our customer service today?” is asking “did you receive everything that you

expected?” If we say we’re ‘satisfied’ with whatever (pizza, cell phone service, etc.) we are saying we could not have anticipated anything better. We got what we wanted, nothing less.

But is that what the life of someone trying to follow Jesus looks like? Can we honestly say, “Yes, the lack of pain I have experienced is fine, and the closeness I feel to God every day of my life is the best I could ever imagine”?

I know I can’t.

Burroughs’ point is - no, we will never truly be satisfied in this life. We can be truly content but we will never have a sense of “yes, this is as good as it will ever get, and I have all that I ever could have expected to get from life and from God.”

The reality is, to be fully satisfied by the things of God we’ll have to wait a bit. As Paul wrote in a letter to the church in Corinth

**“FOR NOW WE SEE IN A MIRROR DIMLY, BUT THEN FACE TO FACE. NOW I KNOW IN PART; THEN I SHALL KNOW FULLY, EVEN AS I HAVE BEEN FULLY KNOWN.”**

If we were hoping to be satisfied by the things of *this world*, we can know the full extent of them and have a sense of satisfaction. Which of course, from a Biblical worldview, is not true satisfaction.

Either we long to be satisfied by nothing other than God himself, or something else. If we will be satisfied by God, we won’t fully experience it while in this broken world. If we long to be satisfied with material things, or success, or approval of others, or something else, we *can* fully experience those things, but we’ll never have enough for a real sense of contentment.

Burroughs echoes the observation by 17th century French Philosopher Blaise Pascal, that the human heart has a God-shaped hole that no other desire can fill. Burroughs is essentially saying the same thing when he claims:

## **“A SOUL THAT IS CAPABLE OF GOD CAN BE FILLED WITH NOTHING ELSE BUT GOD.”**

Any attempt to fill that void with something other than God Himself will fall short. If we try to find satisfaction in this world, we will be disappointed.

We can look at our situation in life and say, “I need nothing else to be happy, content, at peace, with a purpose. I don’t need a better job, better health, whatever... God doesn’t have to give me those things for me to be content.” Great, that is contentment.

At the same time, we look around this world with dissatisfaction and say, “It wasn’t meant to be this way. I hate sickness and death. I am not as close to God as I know I could be... I will never know Him enough this side of eternity”

So be content, but not satisfied. From a Biblical perspective, they are mutually exclusive. So fight the urge to confuse them and remember which one you want, which one you don’t, and live accordingly.

The **trouble** is that satisfaction in this life is a misdirected goal in the first place. It seems nice in many ways, but the **truth** is - it’s unattainable. We can only be truly, fully satisfied with God, and we will never have Him completely on this side of eternity.

# ENTITLEMENT

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## TROUBLE: I'M NOT GETTING WHAT I DESERVE

*I work hard, did well in school. I'm an honest, good worker. I've given up so much for others...and this is what I get in return?*

## TRUTH: BUT WHAT IF YOU ARE?

Entitlement is thinking we deserve something, believing others owe us simply because of who we are. This becomes so embedded in us we believe that life / others / God / the universe - owe us something. Entitlement will rob us of contentment because we never feel satisfied with what we have. It is much easier to look at who we think we are, and what we've done, and calculate what we feel we deserve.

It's a bad sign when you start a sentence with "I deserve..." The notion that we deserve good things is completely contradictory to how we are described in the Bible. In fact, if you start a sentence with "I deserve..." and end it with anything other than "death" - you do not have a Biblical understanding of who you are.

We read in 1 Timothy:

# GODLINESS WITH CONTENTMENT IS GREAT GAIN, FOR WE BROUGHT NOTHING INTO THE WORLD, AND WE CANNOT TAKE ANYTHING OUT OF THE WORLD

yet we find it so hard to live that.

If we look around our culture, it's clear we have developed an incredible sense of entitlement that permeates every facet of life.

“Keep the immigrants out! - we *deserve* to be here, but they don't” (since your ancestors immigrated a few generations ago, and that makes it *totally* different). Kids who think they *deserve* a car simply for staying alive 16 years. Students who feel they *deserve* good grades because they showed up. Spouses who leave because they *deserve* personal happiness, no matter what harm it causes their family and no matter what they vowed. There is a powerful sense of “I deserve this” all around us -and if we're honest - within us.

Entitlement gives us the sense, “whatever good things I have now - I deserve.” That belief makes it hard to be content as we can't appreciate the good things as a sign of love, but merely what we are owed. Entitlement also can (and likely will) cause us to feel we're *not yet* getting all we deserve. Not only do we think the good we have is due to us, but also there is more we deserve. And the bad we currently experience ought to be taken away.

There is no way we can be content if we are living in a state of “I deserve better.”

# WE WILL NEVER BE CONTENT IF WE HONESTLY THINK, “I DESERVE BETTER THAN THIS. GOD OWES ME.”

When we think who we are is a big deal, we assume we are owed some great things in life. When we then look around and realize - to our horror- there are others on the planet who have better stuff than we do - we become are crushed.

The bottom line is this sense of entitlement will always lead to discontentment. It will drive us forward with a sense that we deserve better than we currently have, never allowing us to be satisfied. We will forever be searching, longing, reaching for what we think we ought to have, and believing the lie we tell ourselves. That if only we had what we deserve, things will be fine.

The **trouble** is we convince ourselves we're pretty special, and deserve all the good we have, and more. The **truth** is we are sinful people, and all the good we have from a loving God is pure, undeserved grace.

# GREED

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## TROUBLE: I JUST WANT A LITTLE BIT MORE

*I don't want a McMansion, just a little nicer house, with a better school for my kids. I'll be happy with just one more promotion.*

## TRUTH: NO...NO, YOU DON'T

If I'm honest, most of my discontentment comes from comparing myself to those who have more than I do (a tiny percentage of the world's population). I convince myself life is not fair, I'm not getting what I should, and if I could just get a little more - then I would be happy.

I just need a bit more.

Not too much.

I know greed is bad.

I don't want to be super-rich.

Just a little better off than I am now.

Likely, the word 'greed' doesn't fit who we think we are. We translate the same idea into the English Bible as 'to covet' - to want things you don't have. However, *covet* has become an exclusively religious word (like salvation, repent, etc). So we'll stick with *greed*, although if it helps, remember we're actually talking about coveting.

Most of the time, the thing we want is not the problem, but our attitude towards it. There are *some* things we want that are always bad, but the problems with those are obvious. When we want good things for the wrong reasons, at the wrong times, or in the wrong amounts is when we convince ourselves there are no problems, when there are. Wanting a promotion / new car/ bigger house / raise is fine, but if we feel we need it, or we can't live without it - there's a problem. The tip-off is often a constant, unquenchable desire for more. If we can't live without this job/ car/ house/ raise - why would we be content and not need the one after that? Why do we think this will ever end?

## **OUR MOST TRUTHFUL RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION "HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?" IS LIKELY, "JUST A BIT MORE."**

Often we try to temper greed so it's not so obviously deplorable, to make it more palatable, if only to ourselves. We couch this discontent-laden greed in some 'good' or 'moral' or even 'Christian' virtue. Then surely no one (including ourselves) can find fault in it.

Culture tells us to "look out for #1", but this sounds harsh to someone trying to follow Jesus, so we create a Christian version. We replace 'obvious' idols with ones that seem more tolerable. So we save our money "because I need my kids to be safe in their own yard" or we spend our income on fancy cars "so my wife won't have problems driving home in bad weather." We then attempt to convince others (and ourselves) we are not really greedy. We just want some 'good' thing, like safety or security. Clearly wanting a reliable car, or safety for our kids are not bad

things - these are all truly good things. But, when we use them to convince ourselves or others that our real deep motives are not something a lot closer to greed - we have a problem.

We have tolerated greed for so long, that when we hear Jesus say things like “don’t store up treasures for yourselves” it’s usually followed by “now obviously Jesus didn’t mean that we shouldn’t save up for our own future.... so let’s unpack what he really meant for us to do.” I’m not saying we should in no way save for the future, rather I want to point out how we are so convinced that keeping excess money for ourselves is ‘good’ - that we never imagine Jesus’ teaching here could even apply to the topic.

That we can have lust/covet/greed for *good* things is not something I understood well for a long time. For example, “taking care of your kids’ education.” The Church has been at the forefront of education for centuries. So we feel we can do no wrong spending immense amounts of time, energy, and money to ensure our kids get the best education possible. Who could be against that? Our Mormon, Muslim, and atheist neighbours likely agree with us, so we have even more confirmation.

Do we ever stop and analyze why we’re really doing it? What is the core desire? To be clear, there are good, God-honouring reasons to give our kids a great education, equipping them to make a difference in the world. We need Jesus-followers who are nurses, lawyers, professors, and in order to do these things well, one needs years of formal education. However, is that really the reason? I am constantly amazed at young Christians (and more often their parents) when talking about career options. Very often, the first thing that comes up is income potential. We may talk a lot about the noble pursuit of education and the development of minds, but in casual conversations, the off-the-cuff “you can make a lot of money doing that” reveals what we are truly thinking. Yes, there are plenty of good things we can do with financial resources once we have them, but why are we aiming first at acquiring

money, and then trying to find ways to use some portion of it to do good?

There are obvious differences between greed and wealth. You can be greedy and rich, greedy and poor, content and rich, or content and poor. The level of your economic status does not determine your level of contentment. Yes, it has some impact, but from my experience living in countries at both the top 5% and bottom 5% of global wealth, I'm not sure the relation between the two is what we think. All four combinations of wealth and contentment are possible, and you probably know people who fit into each. So the question is not wealth, but the desires for it. Greed is the constant grasping at the level higher than we currently are. Remember to covet is to yearn to possess or have something. The problem is never what we have, but what we want.

This is not comfortable for me, or you either, I imagine. Greed is something we all struggle with - a lot. But living in the tension of recognizing our own greed is good. Those of us raised in a society so entirely soaked with greed - who have been saturated with 'you deserve better' since we were kids, and told we should always want more - I'm not sure we will ever entirely shake it. So if we ever start to feel comfortable with the level of greed in our hearts, we should be clear we've actually lowered greed, and not merely raised our level of acceptance and desensitization to coveting.

The **trouble** is we've bought into the lie that we need more to be happy, and we'd be happy with just a little more. The **truth** is that compared to all the humans who have ever lived, we have so much it's ridiculous. Thinking just a bit more - or any amount more - will make us happy is buying into the lie that consumption of things is where our joy comes from. Jesus said "it's better to give than receive" not as a command, but a statement of truth. We will find contentment when we live in His truth, not fight against it.

# FEAR

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## **TROUBLE: SO MANY THINGS COULD GO WRONG, AND ANY ONE OF THEM WOULD RUIN ME**

*Right now - one more problem with my kid at school, one more unexpected bill, or one more 'concerning' lab result and I'm done.*

## **TRUTH: YOU WILL NOT BE RUINED**

Fear seems like a natural reaction to many parts of this life. It's a knee-jerk response to so much that happens to us, or more often - what we think might happen to us. We imagine all the bad things that could happen, and just like that, we're scared.

Someone close to us could get sick. You could lose your job. Get failing grades. Lose your hair. Burn your alfredo sauce. Forget someone's birthday. Get a paper cut - that kind that really, really hurts. Get cancer. Crash your car. Someone else crashes into your car. Your child crashes your car. Your child crashes your car into your other car. Lose your job. Your business goes under. You think maybe you left the waffle iron plugged in.

If you start to think about all the things that could go wrong - there are a lot of things to be scared of. It's very possible to live in

fear that everything (or at least a lot) that can go wrong eventually will and that when it does, you cannot survive it. That will quickly drive you to discontentment, and pin you there.

There are two parts to this discontentment: you think things will go wrong; you think they will destroy you.

The first part is more of an outlook on life, the way you view the world. It's the preverbal 'half-full or half-empty' divide. You can imagine this as a casino bookie in the back of our minds, constantly taking bets and setting the odds for various events. The workforce is being reduced, how likely am I to get one of the dreaded meetings with HR? I have a fever, how likely is it to be a rare malady that will see me shrivel up to a slow and painful death? Conversely, how likely do we think good, pleasant, beneficial things are going to happen to us?

These odds we set for ourselves come to the surface when we compare ourselves to others. We say things like: "they always get the lucky breaks", as we think others have better odds of good things than we do. This first aspect - our 'predicted probability of bad things' - is less damaging than the second aspect.

The second is much deeper and reveals more of what we think about this world. It is the follow-up to: what if you do lose your job / get sick / fired / burn your sauce / crash car?

Then what?

## **DO WE THINK THAT A NEGATIVE OUTCOME WILL DESTROY US OR NOT?**

What really matters is how badly we think it will hurt us. Our *expected damage* from these situations reveals so much more than whether we think things will go wrong. Sure, things may not

look good in my current situation, but what impact is that going to have on my life? Am I going to be crushed by that loss?

If I lose my job, do I think it means financial disaster for my family, which means our lives are ruined and my identity is lost, and I'm a loser, and everything will be horrible forever? Do I think that if I lose my job it may mean massive financial hardship, but our family will always be family, worst-case scenario we have to move in with someone until I can find work, but we'll be OK in the long run?

Our fear is not only based on how optimistic we are about what happens, but how devastating we think the results of a bad outcome will be. We can be 'more optimistic' about the chances of something happening (more half-full kind of thinking) but what we think will result makes that optimism all for nothing. Statistically, an 80% chance of a \$100 loss is the same as a 0.8% chance of a \$10,000 loss. So even if we think there is a low probability of bad things (we think things will generally be good...the glass is half-full) we have the same fear because we believe they will be truly devastating.

We simply cannot be content when we are scared.

When something scares us enough, we become paralyzed. If someone thinks they are about to lose their job, they may actually get fired because their performance drops so much because (ironically) they are so worried about losing their job. If you are waiting for a lab test to come back, you can be so gripped by fear you can do nothing else.

**FEAR CAN TRULY PARALYZE US. AND IT  
SHOULDN'T NEED TO BE SAID, BUT WHEN  
YOU ARE PARALYZED... YOU CAN'T DO MUCH.**

The **trouble** is we see things that may be genuinely scary, things that have real, bad, hurtful outcomes - and we imagine a no-recovery situation. The **truth** is that nothing can separate us from the love of God. The truth is that if God is still with us and for us. The truth is there will be suffering and hurt, and disappointment, but there will always be hope. Suffering and hope are not mutually exclusive, in fact if we engage this world we will always be living some combination of them. We may endure hardship, but it will never be strong enough to extinguish the flame of hope.

# APATHY

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## **TROUBLE: THE ONLY WAY I CAN SURVIVE IS BY NOT CARING ANYMORE**

*If I give my heart to every sad thing, there is nothing left. I can't get involved in every problem because it will just tear me apart.*

## **TRUTH: MAYBE SURVIVE, CERTAINLY NOT THRIVE**

One aspect we must understand is that authentic contentment is not the same as complacency. Apathy is simply not caring, and resigning to the fact that things will never be better. It's thinking you can't do anything that will matter or change the outcome. It's that deep sense of 'why bother' or even 'who cares.'

If we believe that contentment is the same (or at least close to) apathy, our knee-jerk reaction is to run away. We know apathy is when people just give up, don't try anymore, and aren't doing anything. We know we hate that, or at least we know we're supposed to hate that. If apathy is the opposite of busyness and putting in a solid effort, we know we want to distance ourselves from it as much as possible. We've been taught that busyness - hustle - is one of the highest goals in our culture, therefore *not doing something* is one of the worst things we can (not) do. We

don't want to be 'that guy' - the lazy one who free-rides in groups, who never carries their load, the one others have to make up for. Perhaps worse than *being* that person, we really don't want people to *think* we're that person.

But things around us are not OK.

People are suffering from abuse of power everywhere we look. How can we live in this world, and be content? How do we face things that are unjust or just plain wrong? How do we witness hunger, and sickness and death, and betrayal, and corruption - and then say: "I'm content with life"?

This is not merely a rhetorical or even a theoretical question. For me, this is very real, and very practical.

This is maybe the single hardest distinction for many of us in dealing with contentment. We have to distinguish between "I am content with what I have" and an apathetic "I won't make any effort to make things better."

So what is it?

Should we aim for a life of contentment, or constantly be troubled by what we see around us?

Yes, and yes.

I think the Bible claims both should be true in our lives. We should have an inner sense of contentment, while never losing our sense of discontentment for the brokenness of this world.

## **"LET MY HEART BE BROKEN BY THE THINGS THAT BREAK THE HEART OF GOD"**

It is clear we should have a heart for others, a sense of compassion (literally 'suffering along with') for those around us. In

the Old Testament, God repeatedly told his people to look after the sick, the widows, the orphans, the foreigners, all those who were under-resourced and marginalized. He told his people to hate oppression, to fight injustice, and to do whatever they could to stop the mistreatment of others. When Jesus arrived on the scene, he relayed the exact same message. This call to care for the outsiders, the outcast, and the overlooked is recorded over and over and over throughout the Bible.

One explanation of how we can paradoxically remain both content and un-apathetic about our world requires us to differentiate who is suffering.

When we moan and whinge about what we don't (or do) have, we are discontent. That's a bad thing because we aren't seeing all the good given to us, the grace and mercy shown to us, and the hope we have.

However, when we see the suffering of others and merely think "well, that's too bad, I guess it's the hand they were dealt..." we are being apathetic towards suffering in our world.

## **WE CAN SIMULTANEOUSLY CONSIDER OUR SITUATION SUFFICIENT, AND LOOK AT THE TROUBLES OF OTHERS AND BE VERY UPSET.**

There is no way we can read the Christian scriptures and assume we are not supposed to be upset by the crappy things that happen in our world. We read repeatedly how God is angry when those who cannot stand up for themselves are mistreated and how He calls His people to do something about it. If we just say "sorry, I'm kind of content with my life right now- I don't want to be brought down with your misery" we are directly defying

what God has asked us to do. God is not calling us to ignore the things that are wrong with this world.

We are to be content with what God has done for us, what He has given us, what situation he has put us in, and the world he has made. However, we should be very discontented with the mess we and others have made of it. We should be content with the material goods we have, but be outraged when rebels steal food from villagers in Congo. We should be content with the intellect, the education we have been given, but angry when children lose the chance to learn because of systemic racism. We should be content with our wages, but furious at slavery. Content with our family, but indignant when family is a breeding ground for abuse and neglect.

If we are not convinced we can be content in this life and also outraged at injustice, then I think we've lost the plot. We have to allow this tension to exist, this sense of "yes, things suck" but also "yes, I'm content."

The **trouble** is there are so many problems in this world, we resign ourselves to them. We think apathy may be the only response that allows us to survive. The **truth** is God has called us to play a role in his redemption of all things. "All things" includes, you guessed it, everything. We need to fight for justice, defend those who can't defend themselves, and use our voice to speak up for those who have been robbed of theirs.

**G**eorge Watts has lived in East Africa for the past 7 years, coming alongside local believers to help alleviate suffering, encourage development, and equip the next generation of leaders. He currently serves as director of a leading consulting firm in Rwanda, leveraging business for human flourishing.



Before that, he left Canada for a year in the former USSR, three years in the American Mid-West, and eight years in the French Alps.

He holds degrees in Biblical studies (how God works among us), history (how people have lived before us), and graduate degrees in management & organizational behaviour (how we work together). His PhD focused on coffee growers' access to the specialty coffee market.

George, his wife Susan, and their four kids are no longer sure where "home" is - but live in Kigali, Rwanda.

More of his writing can be found at:

[www.ggwatts.com](http://www.ggwatts.com)

*I hope this helped you take a step towards deeper contentment.*

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*~ George*



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OR JUST EMAIL IT TO SOMEONE.**



First posted to [www.ggwatts.com](http://www.ggwatts.com) on Jan 17, 2022

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