

## Contented Souls: Overcoming “Greener Pastures” Syndrome

Sometimes it’s time to move. I get that. I have moved. It is time to move when the call that placed you where you are is superseded by a new call. When you know for certain that the move is from the Lord, then you move. Period. No looking back.

But often it’s not time to move. It is time to stay in spite of the difficulties. In order to stay put, stay healthy, and stay focused on your call, you will have to overcome “Greener Pastures” Syndrome. Greener Pastures Syndrome is *when you think that a move is going to solve a contentment problem*. It won’t. If you can’t be happy in the Lord where you are, you will not become happy in the Lord by changing environments. Either your security and satisfaction come from who you are in Christ or you won’t be secure and satisfied anywhere. Either your definition of success is *obedience to God’s call* or failure awaits you wherever you go. Moving to a new church or ministry will not make you a contented soul.

There is a *vision distortion* inherent in Greener Pastures Syndrome. When we are experiencing frustration or boredom we become particularly vulnerable to this vision distortion. We start seeing only the things that dissatisfy us where we are and only the things that excite us in other places. We forget that “familiarity breeds contempt.” Looking at a dreamy new place from a distance, we don’t see the flaws. There is always someplace that looks better from a distance than the present place we see up close. Deep in our hearts we know that every place has lots of problems, but maybe, just maybe the next place will be the perfect one. We soon find out that it isn’t and that Greener Pastures Syndrome has claimed another victim.

So how do you overcome Greener Pastures Syndrome? The answer is to *become a contented soul where you are*.

As I have written before, church health correlates strongly with pastoral tenure. There are many factors that contribute to long pastoral tenure, not all of which are under the pastor’s control. But in my conversations with long-tenured pastors I have discovered that *pastors who stay have learned to be contented souls right where they are*. It doesn’t mean they will never go anywhere else. It means that if they do move it will be because of call, not Greener Pastures Syndrome. These men have learned to be contented souls right here, right now.

So how can you learn to become a contented soul where you are? Let me suggest a few habits to cultivate.

1. Commit to memory Hebrews 13:5-6. Meditate on it often.

*Keep your life free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" (ESV)*

2. Put a cross where you will see it often to remember how highly God values you. He values you not for what you can do for him (which is nothing), but for who you are, his child. Calvary proves it. Praise him for that and rest in his love.

3. Recall God's faithfulness at times in the past when you were at a difficult point. Remind yourself that he hasn't changed. Give thanks.

4. Get some perspective by talking with peers. Isolation breeds vision distortion. Don't isolate yourself. Build your support network.

5. Remember specifically what God has called you to do and that success is defined as faithfulness. Often we oppress ourselves by adding weight that we weren't designed to carry – the weight of results, the weight of pleasing everyone, and the weight of being impressive. Lose the weight! Focus on what God has called you to do and jettison the rest.

6. Feed your soul through prayer, rest, and recreation. Be the human being God created you to be, not some workaholic robot. Soul care, too, is important work.

Dear brothers, however long the Lord gives us to serve him, let's do it as contented souls. We'll be much happier servants and, in the long run, more fruitful ones.