

Contentment Presentation Outline

- Today, I am going to be covering the topic of contentment and how it relates to happiness.
 - However, I am going to approach this topic in a rather unique fashion when compared to previous presenters
 - I am going to dedicate this presentation to my late grandfather, whose own philosophy shaped much of my own
 - Of course, this probably means I should give a very brief introduction and biography of the man
 - Joe Riley Runions was born in 1928
 - Most of his early life was consequently spent in the Great Depression
 - Consequently, food was scarce and many days were spent trading food with the local children. Onions and biscuits were a delicacy.
 - Papaw, as I called him, would also describe his father as a sickly man, though many of us expected this was a polite way of calling him an alcoholic
 - He says that his father spent many days doing nothing more than lying on the couch
 - Therefore, my Papaw was forced to start working at a very young age, often aiding his father in the field and even worked it alone some days
 - Due to this, Papaw dropped out of school in the eighth grade
 - Eventually, he took up work as a carpenter in his later teen years and remained in the profession for the rest of his life, running a small cabinet shop before retiring
 - He would also marry twice, leaving his first wife due to unfaithfulness, and father seven children in total, including my father
 - He passed away in 2017 at the age of 84
 - At least that's what the newspaper said. If anyone was paying attention, he was actually 89. I digress.
 - As may be apparent, his life wasn't the easiest or the most fortunate. That may be why he adopted the philosophy on which I am going to present here.
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- Furthermore, as a quick disclaimer, I think it necessary to define exactly what I mean by "happiness" and "contentment"

- Well, simply put: happiness is the emotional state of being happy. It is a feeling of joy that is a reaction to a positive experience within your life.
 - This experience may be a good grade on a test or first holding your child.
 - First thing one may notice with this definition is that it is much different than the Aristotelian *eudaimonia*.
 - It's not exactly synonymous to "living well" or "flourishing," but I believe that's an important distinction. After all, your overall life can be flourishing or well even if you are currently in an emotional rut.
 - In fact, it is contentment in my eyes whose connotation more closely aligns with *eudaimonia*
 - It is often credited as being a type of relationship with one's life that can be present even in the Greatest Depressions. All contentment may take is recognizing that the good in your life outweighs the bad.
- With that rather lengthy introduction, let us start in on the meat of this presentation
 - And, I wish to do so framed in reference to one of my favorite songs, "Simple Man" by Lynyrd Skynyrd
- So, first piece of advice: "Don't live too fast"
 - Life doesn't stop for anyone, but that doesn't mean we can't stop for it
 - It's an age-old saying I'm sure we've all heard: "Stop and smell the roses"
 - I know that is easier said than done for most of us. Trust me, I struggle greatly with this myself.
 - There always seems to be another meeting to attend, another assignment to complete, or another event to organize.
 - But, make time for the people and things that mean something to you
 - I find it hard to believe that the last regret on anyone's deathbed was that they spent too much quality time with their children or that they wish they had not taken the time to let their spouse know they are loved
 - It's also never wise to treat life like a race. The competitions do not matter at the end of the day. It's not about who reaches the finish line first. There's no trophy to

claim, except for the same participatory trophy everyone gets placed above their grave.

- Contentment relies heavily on one's ability to approach life in this manner.
 - As previously described, contentment is a way of viewing one's own life. Therefore, attentiveness and awareness is paramount. It's hard to see the important details when you take life too fast. Your peripherals become blurred and you grow narrow-sighted, too focused on a single goal.
 - With such a vision at such a pace, we often find ourselves tripping over even the smallest of obstacles in our path, detouring our face straight into the pavement. Instead, if we had moderated our speed and taken notice of these pebbles, we could have avoided them, and even if we didn't, it sure would have hurt a lot less.
 - The secret then is to just get up and keep going.
- In other words, "troubles will come and they will pass"
 - Some form of this saying was hounded in to me from a very young age
 - I suspect it had a lot to do with the hardships that my father and grandfather faced in their own lives
 - It seemed at times this was the only thing that kept them going
 - One thing that was held close to the heart of my aforementioned predecessors was the Serenity Prayer, that all of you should now be acquainted with
 - "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."
 - The prayer in its entirety hangs above the kitchen sink window back home in West Tennessee, reminiscent of the "Live, Laugh, Love" ones of which we all are aware
 - The point of the prayer is to remind its hearer that troubles exist, and they aren't all within our control
 - Part of contentment is having that wisdom to tell the difference and knowing that you will be fine either way
 - Either you can stop the trouble yourself, and there's no place for worry, or you cannot, and once again that means you shouldn't worry about it. It's inevitable.
 - Moreover, don't neglect that which you can change by obsessing over that which you cannot. In the end, you'll find that you solved nothing otherwise.

- Now, it's not always about merely what you can change, but also what those you love can help you with.

- “Find a woman and you’ll find love”
 - Perhaps I should preface this rather exclusive statement
 - A proper extrapolation of the lyric will most likely translate to “Find a person that you can trust and live with and you’ll find love.”
 - As you may have recalled from earlier, my grandfather had left his first wife due to her unfaithfulness
 - When hearing this, a person may be quick to assume that his opinion on relationships had become jaded, but that’s not necessarily true
 - In fact, while his heart was described as never quite being in the right place after the divorce, his views on relationships became far more pragmatic
 - The lyric and my more inclusive translation are worded in a way that insinuates that love is a byproduct of something else, a woman in the former and trust and cooperation in the latter
 - And I believe this seemingly innocuous distinction is extremely important
 - Love isn’t a feeling defined by the constant highs felt from the infatuated stages of a relationship. The hard and fast truth is that there will be times when you just want to be at each others’ necks, and not in the good sense
 - The question isn’t always how do I feel about my partner at this moment. It’s simply a question of whether you trust them and if the relationship is worth the extra effort that is needed. It’s another question of whether one is content
 - This is a view that the old man endorsed. He loved my grandmother not for her beauty that had long faded or the butterflies that he got in his stomach when they were together. No, he had loved and lost before in that way, and he wasn’t the man to make mistakes twice.
 - And, he often thanked God for the wisdom he was granted

 - “Don't Forget Son There is Someone Up Above”

- I know this section won't apply to all of you, Christianity played a huge role in my grandfather's life
 - He spent almost every Sunday in Church with his family
 - Now, while religion has not been an ever-present influence in my life, it has shaped how I see the world a lot
 - So, how does it relate to contentment?
 - Well, it's quite simple really. With religion, there's this knowledge or faith that everything is going to workout in the end one way or another
 - In other words, the good is always going to come out on top. You as an individual may not live to see it, but that's okay. You don't have to. At least in my case, the faith alone will suffice.
 - This attitude alone has helped countless people that I have met in my life deal with the shortcomings of life
 - Knowing that there is someone always in your corner, no matter how grim things seem to be, is a comforting thought. A lot of times, it's the only one that keeps people going.
 - Therefore, as the lyric advises, just remember that God is always there with you. The earthly matters will sort themselves out in the end, God will it.
 - In the meantime, as also touched upon earlier, just stay focused on things that you can change and that are in your power. All you can ask God for is the strength to keep fighting.
- Of course, this attitude is the basis of the next piece of advice: "Forget your Lust for the Rich Man's Gold"
 - I would bet we've all heard it before: "Money is the root of all evil."
 - Hell, the very lyric can be connected to at least three or four of the deadly sins as described in the Christian faith
 - While I could spend the next couple of minutes approaching this idea from the viewpoint of faith, I don't think it's necessary
 - Just take our previous readings as a reference point.
 - Money, at least in its accumulation past the point of \$75K, cannot buy happiness, or contentment in this context
 - For proof, just think about all the things that you love most in life
 - I'm sure most of us will conjure up a list of friends, family, maybe even a significant other

- In the end, money doesn't gain you any of these things, well not in the ways that matter. A friend or loved one whose basis for their loving you is monetary is no true friend or loved one. Their love is then contingent and conditional.
 - Interestingly, the avoidance of relying on materialistic methods of happiness or contentment is best defended with the assertion that any feeling reliant on external stimuli is contingent on its presence
 - In other words, a materialist person constantly stands on a rug that is threatened to be pulled out from under them at any time.
 - Instead, one must look inward for their source of contentment
- Simply put, "All That You Need is in Your Soul"
 - My grandfather and I have always been rather large proponents of an internal source of contentment
 - While I don't believe that such a claim is a controversial one, it would still appear that many people fail to live up to this standard
 - The American Dream has almost become synonymous with having the biggest house, the fanciest designer clothes, and the fastest cars.
 - Every time you turn on the Television or open up your choice of Social Media, there's another celebrity that is being feigned over, often advertising some product of their own
 - I must admit, even I fall victim to the craze.
 - Money may not buy happiness or contentment, but it does get me that nice gaming computer after all
 - However, those things will eventually grow old as well. They will just become another thing of your estate, often finding yourself stuck on that hedonistic treadmill
 - On the other hand, if your springs of delight are of an inner nature, found within yourself, no one can take that away. There's no carpet to be pulled from under you.
 - My grandfather had a saying for this. He'd sat me down and told me, "There's only one way to get everything you want in life: stop wanting so much."
 - Wise words from a wise man, but I realize that's much easier said than done
- But, "You Can Do This, Oh Babe, if You Try"

- Different techniques have helped for a lot of different people.
 - I've offered some minor advice throughout this presentation, and so has a few of our previous presenters
 - Karlie discussed tricks on combatting anxiety, and idea she borrows from Montaigne,
 - Attense gave 6 methods for being present and staying aware,
 - Caleb touched upon Christian Hedonism and how it relates to happiness (and thereby contentment,
 - Matthew talked about how certain factors have motivated him within his life to stay ahead of the curve
 - Even Sam, our first presenter, warned against the dangers of a corrupted hedonism that leads to biological and neurological harm
 - Not to mention, a large number of our authors have done so as well.
 - Epicureans talk of the garden and the cost-benefit analysis of pleasure and pain
 - Stoics and Buddhist seek to do something similar by throwing off all unnecessary detachment to escape suffering
 - Montaigne writes and reanalyzes his texts in a way that keeps his views from stagnating
 - Hell, Haybron's whole book was similar to a self-help guide
 - My point is that it would seem we've all made attempts to better ourselves in some way. We all have our little tricks as Montaigne would call them
 - The take away from this presentation is, as put by Lynyrd Skynyrd,
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- "All I Want for You My Son is to be Satisfied"
 - I know a lot of people will diverge on this point, Haybron being a notable one, but I believe it's one of the most important aspects for contentment
 - It sounds rather bleak to only ask a person to be satisfied with their life
 - There's also admittedly some problems that arise.
 - After all, how can you ever better yourself if you're always satisfied and can't someone have a bad life but be satisfied?
 - While not an exhaustive list, I would say these assertions are a bit wrongheaded.
 - I can be satisfied with how far I've come but still seek to improve myself. The important thing is that you don't become heartbroken at failures. Be satisfied with the knowledge that you tried.
 - And, I must ask, can a person really be satisfied with a bad life? Doesn't that seem contradictory. Who dictates what a good life is if

not the person that has lived it? Why should the judgment of your life by another person change how you view your own, unless you agree with them.

- It's a rather simple-minded philosophy, I must admit, pun-intended. It's to be expected from a man like my grandfather.
 - A simple word from a simple man. I'll leave y'all with one more saying, one I find quite enjoyable. My father and grandfather love to say it.
 - KISS: Keep it Simple, Stupid