

A season of contentment

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I applied for a position at a small church in Rhode Island. After a few interviews, the search committee called the esteemed Jack Stotts, who was my boss for many years and later became one of my references. Dr. Stotts told the committee, “Carol will never be content.”

It was an insightful comment. In those five words, Stotts managed to fit in my greatest attributes along with my glaring character defects. The committee liked the sound of the words, and so they called me. And each time they got exhausted with my next project, idea, or plan for the future of the church, I would smile, shrug my shoulders, and say, “He warned you.”

My lack of contentment isn’t because I’m materialistic. I don’t need stuff. Each year, when my family asks me to give them a Christmas list, I think as hard as I can, and I come up with something completely unsatisfactory. This year, I had one thing on my list: a mug.

But I do have an overwhelming need to be useful. I have this longing to do something with my life. I have this drive to make these short days *mean something*. To live into the fullness of God's intent for me. I understand that we've been given gifts and talents, and I don't want to bury them, but I want to employ them to their fullest capacity. And that often leaves me exhausted.

As I look back on 2011, it's been a season of foundering. It's been punctuated with book, business, and funding plans that didn't quite fit together, for one reason or another. I'm walking into this New Year feeling like a tightly knit sweater with five gaping holes and mysterious loose ends.

And yet, in the midst of it, I feel strangely content.

Maybe this is one of the joys of getting older that no one lets you know about. Perhaps this comes when you have a dozen years of the pastorate behind you. But even in the midst of things not working out as I planned, I woke up *without* that gnawing, discontented hunger. There was a fullness and satisfaction that I'm not quite used to.

I don't know how long the feeling will be here. Perhaps it's a momentary lapse in my life of discontent that will lead me into this new year. But I'll enjoy it while it lasts.