

Contagious Joy

Part 18 – The Secret of Contentment... It's a God Thing

Philippians 4:10-19

August 16, 2009

Remember the song, "I Can't Get No Satisfaction." 40 years later you still hear that as a common complaint. All the time you meet people who are unhappy, unfulfilled, and unsatisfied. If you were to believe what the commercials tell you, you would believe that contentment was something that could be sprayed on, rolled, inhaled, eaten or driven. As if all of these products would give you lasting contentment. They don't.

Are you content? No, really?! Do you have a deep sense of well-being that resonates from your very soul? Is contentment something you can work on or does it come more naturally for some people? What are the secrets to developing contentment in our lives?

I. Faithfulness: Focus on God's sovereignty

¹⁰But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity.

- A. Background: Paul rejoices because of their revived interest in his situation. He probably hadn't heard from them in a while and may have wondered if they really cared! At first it looks like he is was a little disappointed, but quickly recovers by allowing them an "out" since they didn't have the opportunity to help him sooner. Communication was slow and cumbersome. There was no UPS guy to deliver the packages or the mailman to deliver the mail.
- B. *Revived:* a horticultural term describing a plant flowering again. The Philippians' generous affection for Paul, after lying dormant for nearly ten years, had once again bloomed. "Like a person rejoicing over the signs of spring after a hard

winter, so Paul rejoiced to see again the signs of personal concern from Philippi after a long interval of silence."
(Hawthorne)

- C. Paul's gracious attitude reflects his patient confidence in God's sovereign providence. He was certain that God in due time would arrange his circumstances to meet his needs. There was no panic on his part, no attempt to manipulate people, no taking matters into his own hands.
- D. God's timing is always on His schedule, which isn't usually our schedule.

II. **Perspective:** Manage your desires appropriately (v. 11-12)

¹¹Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.

¹²I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need

A. There are three kinds of circumstances in life:

1. **Those I can control and I do.** Switch TV channels, if you're hungry you feed yourself.
2. **Those I can control and I don't.** This is not excuse for laziness. Contentment is not apathy, laziness, complacency. If you can change a situation, you don't need contentment – you need to get up and do something about it.
3. **Those I cannot control...** and there are many in life. This is where you need contentment, in uncontrollable circumstances; things that are beyond your power. You have done the best you could, but they are still out of your hands. That's where you need to learn to trust God,

B. It often doesn't happen naturally. It is a choice! Contentment can be learned and developed. It is the only time is used in the NT. This grateful spirit is cultivated in the green house of uneven circumstances.

- C. Background: In this passage, Paul uses two well-known idioms from his day.
1. Paul did not want the Philippians to misunderstand him. He was not rejoicing primarily because their gift had met his need, but because their gift expressed their love and concern for him. Paul had learned to be content and to rejoice regardless of his physical circumstances!
 2. The term translated "*content*" is taken out of the Greek Stoic philosophy which used it to describe a "self-sufficient" person with no needs or weaknesses, someone who had found a completely self-satisfying world. The Stoics aspired to being so self-sufficient that they were untouched by anything. This is a strange word for Paul to use, but he borrows the term to describe the "restful contentment" of a Christian who has freed himself from the constant cravings of a covetous spirit.
 3. The second word helps us to understand that this contentment is something learned. Paul says, "I have *learned* the secret."
 - This verb was used in the Greek mystery religions to describe the person who had worked through the various lower degrees of knowledge until he reached the full possession of the "mystery" itself.
 - Paul is saying, "I have made my way through the progressive detachment from the things of the world, both its comforts and discomforts, and I have gained freedom from those things. Circumstances no longer master me." (Vanderet)
 4. Specifically, Paul could be equally content with little or with much materially because he was rich spiritually. He had learned to avoid comparisons! You don't get your joys or happiness out of things, people, possessions, pleasures, profits, popularity, prestige...

5. Commenting on this period in Paul's life, F. B. Meyer wrote that he was "deprived of every comfort, and cast as a lonely man on the shores of the great strange metropolis, with every movement of his hand clanking a fetter, and nothing before him but the lion's mouth or the sword" (*The Epistle to the Philippians* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1952], 242).

D. Compare Israel's attitude (Exodus 17 cf. Psalm 81).

1. Their grumbling about the water situation was a test to see if they really trusted God. He had not abandoned them! Discontentment has its roots in entitlement!
2. We have become "discontented marionettes, dangling from the strings of the dictatorial puppeteer Covetousness". Coveting is an addiction to things that do not last and a craving for things that do not really matter. (Gary Vanderet)

E. Contentment plays itself out independent of circumstances.

1. **Affluence**: Humble means vs. prosperity
 - John D. Rockefeller was once asked "How much money does it take to satisfy a man?" His surprising answer, "A little bit more than he has."
2. **Appetite**: Being filled (fattening of an animal) vs. going hungry (I Cor. 4:11)
3. **Materialism**: Having abundance vs. suffering need
 - Heb. 13:5 Be content with what you have
 - II Cor. 12:10

III. **Christ-Centered Confidence**: Draw on Christ's Power (v. 13)

¹³*I can do all things through (in) Him who strengthens me.*

Jerusalem Bible: "There is nothing I cannot master with the help of the one who gives me strength."

A. *Can do*:

1. Be strong and have strength. Eph. 3:20

2. We should also remember that there is a difference between arrogance and godly confidence. The arrogant person relies on his own strengths to accomplish things, but a person with godly confidence relies on God's providence.
- B. *Strengthens*: A dynamo is something that gives continual energy. Paul is saying, Jesus Christ is the dynamo of my life. He gives me continuous energy. I don't run out. I am confident and capable to cope with the circumstances of life because I draw on Christ's power. God strengthens us and thus allows us to do things we never dreamed we could. I can handle everything, Paul says. I can cope. He had an external power source. He was depending, not on his own power, but God's power.
- C. Our contentment lies in direct proportion to our willingness to surrender to God and his plans vs. ours. It is His power not ours!
1. J Vernon Mc Gee: For example, a train can do “*all things*” between departure and destination when it is “*in*” the tracks made for it. When it leaves the track, it is a wreck and can do nothing!
 2. Better translation is “*in*” vs. through. He is not just a channel through which blessing flows, He is the source!
- D. Do you know how you know when you're depending on your own power? You get tired. Fatigue comes from living life on your own resources rather than on the resources of God. We have to acknowledge our complete lack of ability to do anything of significance apart from Christ.

IV. **Generosity**: Share your resources (v. 14-18)

¹⁴Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction.

¹⁵You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter (accounts Matt/ 25:19...King settling accounts with the slaves) of giving and receiving(credit/debit) but you alone;

¹⁶*for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs.*

¹⁷*Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account.*

¹⁸*But I have received everything in full and have an **abundance** (to overflow,” “to have an excess,” or “to have more than enough); I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.*

A. **Content people are not selfish.** They look out for other's others interests. They look for ways to give; “Preoccupied with the needs of others”. When you focus on others needs, you get the focus off of yourself. It is not all about you.

1. *Proverbs 11:25 "A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed."*
2. *Luke 6:38 "Give to others, and God will give to you..."*
3. *I Timothy 6:18-19 (LB) "...Give happily to those in need, and always be ready to share whatever God has given you. By doing this, you will be storing up real treasure for yourselves in heaven – it is the only safe investment for eternity!" God's bank never goes bankrupt.*

B. The Philippians church was not a wealthy church; just the opposite. It was poverty-stricken church. Yet they were big hearted, generous and giving. Paul said their gift encouraged him. Giving is an encouragement. The Lord causes them to give sacrificially.

C. **4 gifts that we know of...**

1. The collection they took for him when he was in Thessalonica on 2 different occasions (v. 16)
2. They lose track of him but send another gift that is referred to in II Corinthians 9:5.
3. The final gift was after many years and was brought to him in prison by Epaphroditus.
4. Paul used 3 business terms. “Concerning” could be translated “account.” “Giving and receiving” refer to expenditures and receipts; Credit or debit. Paul was a

faithful steward of God's resources and kept careful records of what he received and spent.

D. **Sacrificial terms:**

1. *A fragrant aroma (Numbers 15:3):* This refers back to Lev. 7 which talks about a thank offering. In the Old Testament they would lay an offering on the altar, pour it out and it would create steam that the whole community could smell.
2. *An acceptable sacrifice (Lev. 19:5; Is. 56:7)*
3. *Well-pleasing to God (Heb. 13:15-16; Rom. 12:1-2)*

E. Other sacrifices Christians can make to God beside our material possessions (v. 18) include...

1. Our bodies (Rom. 12:1-2)
2. Our converts (Rom. 15:16)
3. Our praise (Heb. 13:15)
4. Our good works (Heb. 13:16)

F. Do you ever question God's timing when things don't go as you had planned?

1. It is easy to develop a "Woe is me" attitude.
2. It starts with an attitude of gratitude. Rejoice in spite of not because of
3. There are only two kinds of people in the world: givers and takers. The happy people are the giving people. Philippians is about joy and giving – the two main themes go together. Misers are miserable. Which one are you?

G. God helps us to recalibrate what "abundance" really is (v. 18). Paul is very affirming, but I am sure 20 years earlier, he wouldn't have been quite so positive.

V. **Dependence:** Live “in” Christ by trusting Him to meet your needs (v. 19-20).

¹⁹And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

A. **The Source:** *my God*

1. How could Paul be content? His contentment did not come through will power or the power of positive thinking. Paul was not a member of the Stoic philosophic school. It was Jesus Christ who enabled him to be content.
2. "The secret of Paul's independence was his dependence upon God. His self-sufficiency in reality came from being in vital union with One who is all-sufficient." And He's a caring, consistent, capable Father. Our Heavenly Father assumes responsibility for His children's needs. They come through His sovereign control, through His vast resources, through His infinite wisdom, through His loving heart, and through our union with Him.
3. When I buy an insurance policy I read through it to find out what is covered. When I know what's covered, I don't worry – it's covered. The Bible is God's insurance policy. There are over 6000 promises in the Bible which you can claim.

B. **The Scope:** *All your needs*

1. He's very aware of all your needs you have – financial, mental, physical, health, relational. **Needs?** (bare necessities to survive)...

 - In 1890: 16 basic things every one needed in order to survive.
 - The survey was taken less than 100 years later. Now Americans think they have to have 98 things in order to survive.

- Our wants have a way of being exaggerated into needs. We watch advertisements that say "You need this product."

2. There are three categories this does not include:

- **Laziness:** This category does not include the consequences of laziness. This is not an invitation to goof off. God expects you to work. This is not an invitation to set around with folded hands and say, "I'm just trusting the Lord to provide." That isn't contentment, it's complacency. There's a big difference. He has not promised to meet your needs if you sit around and do nothing.
- *I Thes. 3:10* – “*Let him who does not work not eat.*” People who are unwilling (not unable) to work should not be given handouts.
- **Selfishness:** He supplies our needs but not necessarily all our wants. **Need not greed!** God has not guaranteed you to provide you with all your luxuries. This category does not cover all your wants. There's a big difference between needs and wants. The Bible does not say, My God shall supply all your greeds.
- **Foolishness:** God doesn't say You go out and waste your money on luxuries then when you don't have enough money to pay for your needs, I'll supply them. God hasn't agreed to do that. He doesn't bankroll foolishness. If I blow all my money in some area and my needs aren't being met and I say, God, Your promise isn't true! That's not God's fault. He's not promised to bankroll foolishness.

C. **The Supply:** "according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." Cf. (Col. 2:3)

1. *According to His riches:* not out of, but proportional to. As His riches are lavish, so He will give lavishly. He has

more that we can imagine. You have access to it. That doesn't mean we will all be millionaires!

2. There's a big difference between "according" and "out of". Sam Walton, one of the wealthiest men in America is a billionaire. If he wrote you a check for \$1,000 that would be giving to you out of his riches. If he gave you a blank check and said whatever you need that would be giving according to his riches. God gives you a blank check. Phil. 4:19 is the blank check for the faithful believer. A blank check is worthless if it doesn't have a signature on it. But this check is signed with the name Jesus Christ. His check never bounces.

Conclusion:

Horatio Spafford, an attorney who lived in Chicago at the turn of the century, learned this lesson well. He was a dynamic Christian man and was influential in founding the Moody Bible Institute. During the great Chicago fire in 1871, he lost his business. While rebuilding, he sent his wife and children abroad to Europe. On the journey across the Atlantic, their ship was struck by another vessel and sank. Although his wife watched their four children drown, she was miraculously saved by falling on some floating debris. While she was recuperating in a hospital in Wales, she telegraphed her husband two words: "Saved Alone." He, of course, took the first ship to Wales. As he sailed near the spot where the ship had gone down, Dr. Spafford walked along the deck contemplating all that had happened. There he was moved to write the song we sing so often, "It Is Well With My Soul,"

When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
"It is well, it is well with my soul."

This is the message Paul wants to communicate to us. Whatever our circumstances, we can say, "It is well with my soul." This is the key to our contentment, the secret which enables us to rest.

Table Talk

*** Observation:**

3. What had Paul learned? (v. 11-12)
4. How was Paul able to do all things? (v. 13)
5. When had the church at Philippi helped Paul before? (v. 15-16)
6. Why was Paul really pleased with their gift? (v. 17)
7. How did Paul view the gift they had sent by way of Epaphroditus? (v. 18)
8. Who would provide help for the Philippians? (v. 19)

*** Application:**

1. In what areas are you wrestling with contentment?
2. What will you do about it this week?
3. What are three things you have learned in our study of Philippians?

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