

THE WAITING ROOM

Title: Part 3 – “The Secret Nobody Can Teach You”

Date: July 26, 2026

While everyone in the house is saying “Hi,” as always we say “Hi” to our online family. We want you to know we are FOR you so let us know how we can pray for you or serve you this week. AND if this message blesses you, would consider sharing it with a friend or family member.

Well, I've got a question to get us rolling today. By show of hands, how many of you like secrets? Raise your hands up if you like to know the inside scoop. Well, if you have a Bible or the Bible app, grab it and find: **Philippians 4**. Philippians is in the back half of the Bible, if you find Galatians, Ephesians or Colossians then you know you are in the right neighborhood. BUT in Philippians 4 the Apostle Paul is going to let us in on a secret.

While you are looking for that, to get us back in the flow, we are in week 3 of a collection of messages called “The Waiting Room.” If you've missed the first two weeks, they're on our app and website, this is one of those collections that builds week to week so check that out if you missed anything.

BUT we are wrestling with the question: **what do you do when there is nothing you can do but wait?** What do you do when you've pushed every button, knocked on every door, prayed every prayer you can think of AND heaven just seems silent or absent? That lead us to this declaration as we explored the words of Jesus, read this out loud with me:

Even now, God is not absent; He is present. He is not apathetic; He is attentive. He is not angry; He is filled with affection for me.

Don't interpret God's silence for His absence. That was week one. Week two, we learned that a Christ-Follower has an option while we wait that not many people talk about. We can actually receive the thing we'd rather return as a gift with a purpose and a promise. What you're waiting through is not a curse, but a gift with a purpose you can't see yet, and a promise that you can trust?

Again, if you missed anything get caught up, because today we open the doors on yet another waiting room. We spent time in the doctors waiting room and the waiting room at the auto repair shop. AND as painful as those two are, this week, we're going somewhere darker. Somewhere that has broken stronger people than you and me. We are waiting at:

The DMV

You already feel it don't you? Some of you just had a physical reaction. Because everybody in this room has done time at the DMV. You walk in, and the first thing that happens is a machine hands you your new identity. You are not a person anymore. You are B-47. That's who you are now. And you look up at the little screen, the screen of despair, and it says NOW SERVING: B-12.

B-12! 35 B's standing between you and freedom! SO, you scan the room for a chair, and every chair is full of people who have aged visibly since arriving. There's a guy in the corner who looks like he's been there since the Clinton administration. Somebody brought a full meal in, Indian food at that! Somebody else is asleep. The person at A-37 doesn't speak English. AND there is a toddler running laps with no shoes on. Are you with me? Anything I missed?

And here is the thing about the DMV that makes it different from every other waiting room we've visited. At the doctor's office, you're afraid. At the repair shop, you're bracing for the bill. But at the DMV? At the DMV you're not afraid. You're not bracing. You are just... POWERLESS. Because the DMV cannot be hurried. The DMV cannot be charmed. You cannot slip the DMV a twenty. You cannot huff loud enough, sigh deep enough, or check your watch dramatically enough to move that screen one number faster. Believe me! I have field-tested all of these methods. The DMV is the one room in America that is completely immune to your efforts.

Which means the DMV strips you down to one single decision. Since you cannot change the room, the only thing left to decide is: **who you are going to be while you sit in it.**

And THAT is today's message. Because some of you are living in a DMV season right now. It's not a crisis, exactly. It's just a wait with no announced end. The number on the screen has not moved in months. Maybe years. You can't speed it up. You can't opt out. It is what it is.

AND if you are anything like me, your natural response in that situation or that season of life is to get angry. Some of us get angry at God. And even if you'd never say it out loud, even if you're too religious to shake your fist at the sky, somewhere in your heart you've shaken it. Because if God is who God is supposed to be, He could have done something about this by now. He seems to hand everybody else a wrinkle-free life—she got the husband, they got the house, his kids turned out fine—and He could have done that for you. BUT He didn't. So, some of us get angry at God. Some of us turn it inward and get angry at ourselves. Some of us spray it sideways at our family, and they don't even know what they did.

And the temptation often is to run. Just get out of the situation. Start over. Or numb it! Pour something on it, scroll something over it, develop a little habit that takes the edge off. And you already know how that story goes. You know that trying to escape this problem that way just signs you up for a second problem.

SO, you wait... AND the wait is quietly turning you into someone, someone who is either bitter or better. Resentful or restful. Churning or content.

So, today I want to preach a message I am calling:

The Secret Nobody Can Teach You

AND this secret (that nobody can teach you) is the key that unlocks the kind of person you will be in the wait.

If you have Philippians 4, let's go ahead and jump into it. The Apostle Paul writes this in Philippians 4, beginning in verse 10. He says:

¹⁰ I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have LEARNED to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² 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. ¹³ I can do all this through Christ who gives me strength.

I thought about calling this message "The Most Kidnapped Verse in the Bible" because verse 13 has been taken out of its house, thrown in a van, and driven across state lines. BUT today we're bringing it home.

In this passage, Paul claims there is a way to be content in ANY circumstance. Not happy about it. Not pretending it's fine. Content. Contentment is something different. Contentment is when something on the INSIDE is at peace even when everything on the OUTSIDE is going crazy. It's the ability to stop striving internally even when things externally are completely out of your control. Kind of like waiting at the DMV!

AND before you write that off as preacher talk, you need to know where Paul was sitting when he wrote this. Paul was under house arrest in Rome, chained to a rotation of Roman guards, waiting on a trial with no court date. And you know who the emperor was? Nero. The guy who used Christians as human torches to light his garden parties. So, Paul is not journaling from a beach house. Paul knows there is a very real chance he never walks free again. And he was right. He didn't, he was killed in Rome.

So, here's Mr. Go-Change-The-World, the church planter, the missionary, the man in perpetual motion AND now he can't go anywhere. He can't do anything. All he can do is wait. His number is not being called. And from THAT chair Paul writes, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances."

AND when he writes that, it really only leaves us three options. Option one is he's lying (maybe, but you'd have to figure out what he stood to gain from lying). The second option is he's crazy (again maybe, but the rest of his writings show remarkable wisdom and insight). So, the only other option is he knew something we desperately need to know!

SO, some context. Notice what got him talking about contentment in the first place. Look back at **verse 10**, he says "I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me." Here's what's happening. News traveled slowly two thousand years ago. There was no one with a camera phone posting to X what was going down on the ground in real time. So, word finally reaches Philippi that their guy is under arrest, so the church takes up a collection and sends Paul a care package. This care package then takes months to get to Paul. No Amazon Prime! So, when it finally arrives, Paul lights up. "They didn't forget about me after all!"

I love that detail because even the Apostle Paul, in his waiting room, needed to know somebody remembered he was in it. But then watch the pivot in **verse 11**. "I am not saying this because I am in need." In other words: I'm thrilled you remembered me, but I need you to know I wasn't falling apart in here. I wasn't pacing the cell. I wasn't unraveling. Well, why not? "Because I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances."

Paul says he had "learned." I want to show you three things about that phrase today. Three things that I pray will forever change the way you wait. AND as always, I am preaching to myself this morning! So, here's the first one, write this down:

1. Learn what can't be taught.

Now, that sounds like an oxymoron, right? How do you learn what can't be taught? That's what I want to show you, look at verse 11 again and we are going to explore what Paul means. He says:

"I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have **LEARNED** to be content whatever the circumstances."

If you have a Bible or the Bible app, circle or highlight the word “learned.” Because that one word is both the bad news and the good news of this whole passage.

First the bad news: **contentment is learned**. Which means nobody is born with it. It is not a personality type. It's not a temperament some people get but you didn't.

Paul—the Apostle, the missionary, the guy caught up to the third heaven—is telling us that even HE didn't have this automatically. The Greek word is {eh-MAH-thon} emathon, and it means learning through process, through experience, over time. Meaning it took a while. Which also means somewhere back down the road there was a discontent Paul. An anxious Paul. A Paul who churned with angst.

But here's the good news hiding inside the bad news: if contentment is learned, **then it can be learned by YOU**. It's not out of stock! Contentment is not for other more spiritual people. Whatever your natural wiring, whatever your anxiety, whatever your family of origin handed you—contentment is available! It is not issued at birth; it is learned in the wait.

And look, I'm not asking you to buy into this yet. I know some of you have your arms folded. But just work the hypothetical with me for a second. IF it were possible—if there really were a way to be OK on the inside while things on the outside are not OK—wouldn't you want to learn it?

I'm not talking about some kind of phoniness where you are happy about your circumstances. This isn't, “Man I am so glad I am dealing with this \$7,500 medical bill while I wait on the results of the biopsy! Thank you, Jesus! I'm blessed and highly favored!” Nobody's asking you to fake it.

BUT a settledness. A centeredness. A stillness even in the storm. If there were a way, in a waiting-room season where there's no way forward and no way out and it just is what it is, if there was a way to sit in that chair without in eating you alive on the inside, wouldn't you at least want to know how? Hypothetically speaking. Of course you would!

SO, watch what Paul does next, because this is one of those “aha” moments I live for. Verse 12:

¹² 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...

I have learned the secret of being content... That phrase, “learned the secret,” is one single word in Greek and get this, Paul never uses this word anywhere else. In fact, NOBODY uses this word anywhere else in the New Testament. AND that's because it's

the word the mystery cults of the first century used for being initiated. He's talking about secret societies, secret rites, secret knowledge, being brought inside and shown the thing that outsiders can never see. That's the word Paul reaches over, grabs, and says, "I have been initiated into the secret world of contentment."

AND that's not even the only word he borrows in this passage. This is where the, he was insane possibility, begins to break down. He skillfully knew what he was doing because back in verse 11, when Paul says "content," the word he picks is the prized word of the Stoic philosophers of this time. It was their whole brand. The idea of being self-sufficient, not needing anything or anyone. The Stoic ideal was a man so walled-off, so independent, that nothing outside him could touch him. And Paul takes their trophy word, holds it up in front of everybody and then flips it completely inside out. Because watch where his sentence lands two verses later:

¹³ I can do all this **THROUGH CHRIST** who gives me strength.

Paul is saying, I found the very thing you Stoics have been chasing—the unshakeable inside—but I didn't find it your way. Not self-sufficiency BUT in Christ's sufficiency. The Stoics built a wall, but Paul found a Person.

Pretty cool, huh? BUT why would he pick words like that? Well, this is the paradox in our point: Learn what can't be taught. Meaning you cannot audit this class. You cannot download contentment. You cannot borrow mine. There's no book called "Contentment in 30 Days." Well, there probably is, but don't waste your money on it! Because the classroom is the circumstance. The curriculum is the wait. That's why I titled the point the way I did, I can stand up here and point at the door all morning BUT only the wait can walk you through it.

There's a branch of psychology called "acceptance and commitment therapy" (ACT for short) and one of its core findings is that fighting an unchangeable reality doesn't reduce your suffering; it actually multiplies it. Let me say that again, fighting an unchangeable reality doesn't reduce your suffering; it actually multiplies it. Psychologists call the fighting "experiential avoidance." There was even a famous experiment back in the 80s called "The White Bear Study" where they told people, "For the next five minutes, do not think about a white bear." You know what everybody thought about? Exactly. The harder they fought the thought, the stronger it came back. **Meaning resistance feeds the thing you're resisting.**

AND that's the DMV, isn't it? All the huffing and sighing and watch-checking doesn't move the screen. It just cooks YOU. So, enter Paul, two thousand years ago, from a Roman jail, he says peace doesn't come from finally overpowering your circumstances. Peace comes from a whole different place. Which is exactly where Paul goes next. Number 2:

2. Trade “I can” for “He can.”

By this point we're all leaning in like Paul's original readers must have been. “OK, Paul, so what IS it? What's the secret?” And in verse 13, he tells us:

¹³ I can do all this through Christ who gives me strength.

There it is, Philippians 4:13. Somebody has it on a coffee mug. Somebody posted it on their social feed. Athletes write it in their eye black. It's on posters in weight rooms right next to a picture of a guy dunking from the free-throw line. AND I need to lovingly, gently tell you—that is the kidnapping I mentioned earlier.

Because 99% of the time when we quote it that way, “I can do ALL THINGS through Christ,” we mean win the game, close the deal, crush the quarter, chase the dream... we've dragged the verse about as far from its home as it can get. Because Paul is not writing from a locker room. Paul is writing, remember, from chains.

Look at the verse right before it, end of 12:

...whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

I can do all this... “All WHAT?” All of THIS. The hunger, the want, the chains, the waiting... Paul is not saying “Christ will help me do anything I dream up.” Paul is saying, “Christ gives me the strength to endure anything I'm placed in and stay content inside it.”

Do you see why ripping this verse out of context isn't a small deal? Because if Philippians 4:13 is about winning, then the verse is useless to you the moment you're LOSING—which is precisely when you need it! BUT in its real home, this verse was written for the waiting room. It was written for B-47. It's not a verse for the podium; it's a verse for the plastic chair in the DMVs of life.

So, let me break the secret down the way I've come to understand it. This is the whole mystery:

I can't.

He can.

He can through me.

Say those out loud with me... I can't. He can. He can through me. **Break those down:**

I can't. That's where it starts, and that's where most of us get stuck, because we will not say it. We keep white-knuckling and pretending. We keep drumming up one more round of willpower. BUT Paul starts the opposite way, he says I am NOT able and I'm done pretending. BUT...

He can. And how do I know He can? Because He dragged His own cross up a hill and walked through death itself on purpose for me. If He can do that, then whatever I'm sitting in right now is not too heavy for Him. AND...

He can through me. This is the part Paul calls a mystery, and honestly, I can't fully explain it either. The actual life and strength and endurance of Jesus, made available on the inside of an ordinary person, through the power of the Holy Spirit. The mystery of Christ IN you. Not Christ cheering for you from a distance. Christ IN you, doing in you what you could never do on your own power.

So, let me make it personal, the way Paul would:

You're single, and you are scared to death of being single, and you've tried being un-single and that just made everything more complicated—you can't. But He can. He can through you. He can help you be content in your singleness until your number for love is called. OR...

You drive home every night, and you honestly don't know which version of him or her is going to be behind that garage door, and you think, "God, I can't keep doing this!" You're right! You can't. But He can. He can through you. He can help you be content in your relationship struggles and even help you go to work on YOUR issues! Or maybe...

The doctors have moved from "cure" to "manage," and the word "manage" sits on your chest like an elephant. God I can't do this! Exactly! But He can. He can through you. He can teach you the secret of contentment one waiting room at a time. Maybe you say...

Your career is in somebody else's hands, the decision's above your pay grade, and the anxiety is more than you can carry. But He can. And He can through you. You can know peace whether well fed or hungry, whether you have plenty or you are in want. He can do that through you!

In 1944, two Dutch sisters—Corrie and Betsie ten Boom—were shipped to Ravensbrück, a Nazi concentration camp, for the crime of hiding Jews in their home. Their barracks was built for four hundred women; it held fourteen hundred. And their first night there, Corrie felt something bite her leg, and she realized the straw they'd be sleeping on was swarming with fleas. She said, "Betsie, how can we live in such a place?"

Betsie said, "show us how," and it took Corrie a second to realize her sister was already praying. Betsie remembered the passage they'd read that very morning from the little Bible they had somehow smuggled past every inspection. 1 Thessalonians 5, give thanks in ALL circumstances. So, Betsie started thanking God. For being assigned to the same barracks. For the Bible making it through. For the crowding because more women would hear the Word. And then she thanked God for the fleas!

Corrie said, "Betsie, there's no way even God can make me grateful for a flea." Betsie just quoted it back: it says ALL circumstances, not pleasant circumstances. So, they stood between the bunks and thanked God for fleas, and Corrie was positive her sister had finally lost it.

You know how the story ends? For months, those two held open Bible studies in the middle of a Nazi concentration camp. Every night, women packed around a single light bulb hearing God's Word in Dutch, German, French, and Polish. AND the guards never once came in to stop them. It was a mystery until one afternoon Betsie found out why. A supervisor refused to step through their door and said—this is a direct quote—"That place is crawling with fleas!"

The fleas! The thing Corrie couldn't imagine thanking God for was the thing God was using to protect the only free church in Ravensbrück. Come on, somebody! That's a person who learned the mystery! And what God did in a first-century jail and a Nazi barrack, He can do in your 21st-century waiting room!

Trade "I can" for "He can." One more:

3. Look for God at the epicenter.

Go back to Paul under house arrest. Mr. Go-Change-The-World, benched. In his mind, I'm sure it felt like the least productive season of his entire life. So, what does he do while he waits? The only thing left. He writes some letters that hopefully get through. He writes to the church at Philippi. And Ephesus. And Colossae. And a short one to his friend Philemon.

Do you understand what I just described? Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon. We call these the prison epistles and they are some of the most life-giving, world-altering pages in your entire Bible! AND they were written by a man who thought he was just killing time in the waiting room. Paul sat there thinking, "There's nothing else I can do," while he was writing the very words that would outlive the Roman Empire! The empire that chained him is GONE, but we still read his jail mail 2,000 years later!

AND here's the thing I want you to get: Paul had no idea! He had no idea what hung in the balance of his decision to stay faithful when staying faithful looked pointless. He

couldn't see us. He couldn't see 2,000 years of the church. He just saw chains and some parchment. He had no idea what hung in the balance!

And look, neither can you. You have NO idea what or WHO hangs in the balance of your decision to remain faithful in a season where everything says there's no point. Your kids are watching how you wait! People at your job are watching how you wait! Somebody ten years from now is going to be sitting in the exact chair you're in right now, and the story of how YOU sat in it may be the thing God uses to save their life! You will never know unless you stay faithful long enough to find out.

So, think about that thing in your life that stirs your discontentment more than anything else. The thing that will not change, the circumstance that will not move, the number on the screen that is frozen. Got it? Here's the statement:

Where it hurts the worst is where God's working the most.

Amen? Not in the wrinkle-free seasons. Nobody shares a testimony about the year everything went smoothly. When people tell you what God did in them, they always—ALWAYS—point back to the season they wouldn't wish on anyone BUT wouldn't trade for anything. The epicenter of your discontentment and the epicenter of God's activity are the same address. So, stop only looking for God in the exits. Look for Him in the middle of the pain because He's already there, and He's already working!

SO, I know it is summer time, but here is your homework. Every morning this week, before your feet hit the floor, before you touch your phone, pray these words:

I can't. You can. Teach me the mystery of Christ in me.

That's the whole prayer. "Good morning, God. I can't. You can." Name the thing if you want to. And then whisper, "Teach me the mystery of Christ in me." Do that for seven days and see if the chemistry of your wait doesn't start to change. Not the circumstances, the chemistry. Because contentment can't be taught, remember? It has to be learned. And this is how the learning starts.

Because even now God is not absent; He is present. He is not apathetic; He is attentive. He is not angry; He is filled with affection for you. AND the thing you'd give anything to escape may be the center of the greatest thing He ever does in you.

Let me pray for us.