

Godly Contentment Part 2 - "At all Times" (5-23-21)

Introduction: Review of week 1 - Key to contentment: Worshipping the God of true Peace

1 Timothy 6:6 (ESV)

But godliness with contentment is great gain

- **Content:** sufficient, content, a satisfied mind or disposition, to be strong & able to assist someone

1) Content in any circumstance

Philippians 4:11-13 (ESV)

(11) Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be **content**.

(12) I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. (13) I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Note: The secret to contentment - I can handle it, I can make it, I can do it . . . through Christ's power!

***Remember: Whatever steals my peace exposes my idols!**

What circumstances in your life, steal your peace?

Paul has certainly faced some "peace stealing" circumstances, let's look at an example from his life . . .

2) Paul in Prison

Paul called to the region of Macedonia, and he goes right away to the primary town in the area . . .

- Lydia and her family get saved, then a slave girl is set free from demonic possession!
- **The results of successful and powerful ministry?** Paul & Silas are attacked by many in town . . .

Acts 16:23-24 (ESV)

(23) And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. (24) Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Note: Following Jesus and obeying his call will not always lead to "success" as we so often measure it.

Acts 16:25-26 (ESV)

(25) About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, (26) and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened.

Note: 1st miracle - worshipping in prison!

- You want to shake the very foundations of what imprisons you?
- Worship in any & every circumstance!
- That's where true freedom comes from - the power & presence of God, strengthening us in all times!

The story doesn't end there . . .

Acts 16:27-33 (ESV)

(27) When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. (28) But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." (29) And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. (30) Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (31) And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." (32) And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. (33) And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family.

Note: Remember our definition of contentment - includes being **strong & able to assist someone else!**

- This man & his family in this town in Macedonia - their lives were forever changed!
- The name of that town? **Philippi!** And this jailer is now a part of the Philippine church!

Philippians 4:4-13 (ESV)

(4) Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. (5) Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; (6) do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (7) And **the peace of God**, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (8) Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (9) What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and **the God of peace will be with you**. (10) I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. (11) Not that I am speaking of being in need, **for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content**. (12) I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. (13) I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

3) Worship Response (Spiritual Discipline): Fasting

Jesus calls Matthew (Levi) & is now having a great feast with his disciples, tax collectors, & sinners . . .

Luke 5:33-35 (ESV)

(33) And they said to him, "The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, **but yours eat and drink**." (34) And Jesus said to them, "Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? (35) The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days."

Jentezen Franklin from his book "Fasting"

"Fasting is not just a physical discipline, it can be a spiritual feast. Once you "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:8), your hunger for more of His presence eclipses the limitation of your understanding."

Andrew Murray (from his book "With Christ in the school of prayer")

"Prayer needs fasting for its full growth. Prayer is the one hand with which we grasp the invisible. Fasting is the other hand, the one with which we let go of the visible."

Primary Purpose of Fasting (Dr. Richard Foster "Celebration of Discipline")

Focused & Centered on God – God-focused, initiated, & ordained, searching for Him with no other objective to manipulate or control, just a desire to seek Him & find Him & center on Him.

Conclusion: Let's learn to be content in every circumstances by receiving strength in the Lord's presence!

Additional Notes & Tips on Fasting

1) The Role of Fasting

Andrew Murray (from his book "With Christ in the school of prayer")

"Prayer needs fasting for its full growth. Prayer is the one hand with which we grasp the invisible. Fasting is the other hand, the one with which we let go of the visible."

John Wesley on Fasting - "Some have exalted religious fasting beyond all scripture and reason; and others have utterly disregarded it."

Why we should fast - some biblical reasons for fasting . . .

- **Jesus fasted!**

Luke 4:1-2

Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry.

- **People Hearing & Receiving from God fasted!** (Moses & multitudes following Jesus)

Exodus 34:27-28

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.

Matthew 15:32

Now Jesus called His disciples to Himself and said, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way."

- **Mourning** – (David mourning Saul & Jonathan's deaths, & Nehemiah mourning condition of Jerusalem)

2 Samuel 1:11-12

Therefore David took hold of his own clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him. And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son, for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

Nehemiah 1:4

So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

- **Seeking Mercy & Repenting** – both Personally (David & Ahab) & Corporately (Samuel leading Israel)

2 Samuel 12:16

David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground.

1 Kings 21:27

So it was, when Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning.

1 Samuel 7:5-6

And Samuel said, "Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you." So they gathered together at Mizpah, drew water, and poured it out before the LORD. And they fasted that day, and said there, "We have sinned against the LORD." And Samuel judged the children of Israel at Mizpah

- **Seeking God's Help & Intervention** (Esther to save the Jews & Daniel praying for restoration)

Esther 4:16

Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!

Daniel 9:3

Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.

- **Seeking Healing & Deliverance** (Hannah barren & Jesus healing a boy possessed with epilepsy)

1 Samuel 1:7

So it was, year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, that she provoked her; therefore she wept and did not eat.

Matthew 17:21

However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.

- **Seeking Guidance** (Paul, Barnabas, & the early church leaders when appointing people to leadership)

Acts 13:2-3

As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.

Acts 14:23

So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

- **Times of corporate fasting** - There is precedent in scripture for corporate fasts called by leadership in specific circumstances!

Examples:

2 Chronicles 20: King Jehoshaphat – when Judah comes under attack from a multitude of Ammonites & Moabites

Jonah 3: Jonah warns Nineveh of coming judgment, the King & all the city fast to repent & ask for mercy

Ezra 8: Ezra & the people fast to prepare for a 4 month journey back to Jerusalem to seek direction & protection.

Joel 1 & 2: The Prophet Joel calls for a fast from all the people to repent in light of God's call to return to Him

Summary of these examples:

Fasting - Connecting our hearts with God, helps bring about needed growth and change!

Acts 10 - the gospel was opened to the gentiles as a direct result of both Peter & Cornelius fasting!

2) Guidance on Fasting

a) Spiritual Tips for Fasting

- **Purpose of Fasting** - special credit to **Richard Foster** "Celebration of Discipline" (notes from pg. 54-56)

Primary: Focused & Centered on God – God-focused, initiated, & ordained, searching for Him with no other objective to manipulate or control, just a desire to seek Him & find Him & center on Him.

Secondary Benefits:

- Reveals the things that control us – brings sins to the surface
- Reminds us how we are sustained – we feast on the Word during this time

Jentezen Franklin from his book "Fasting" (pg. 56)

"Fasting is not just a physical discipline, it can be a spiritual feast. Once you "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:8), your hunger for more of His presence eclipses the limitation of your understanding."

- Increased concentration & effectiveness in prayer
- Guidance in decisions, Revelation from God, etc.
- Deliverance from bondage, Physical healing & well-being
- Revival in the church

Remember - God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him!

- **Warnings & Wrong Motives in Fasting**

Richard Foster (from his book: "Celebration of Discipline" pg. 47 & 49)

"Whenever there is a form devoid of spiritual power, law will take over because law always carries with it a sense of security & manipulative power. Biblical fasting always centers on spiritual purposes."

- **Not a tool to manipulate God** - We are not manipulating God thru our work, fasting breaks you & helps you grow in faith. We are not "twisting God's arm" when we fast. We are not going to make him do anything He does not want to do (maybe compare David & Ahab). What we are doing is positioning ourselves & preparing our hearts for what is to come.

- **Not to obtain merit or get sins forgiven** – Jesus blood cleanses us. However, fasting can raise our awareness of our sins & bring them to the surface so we can repent.
- **Fasting is not a Christian diet** – if you are just doing it to lose weight, that’s just starving yourself. A fast centers on prayer, worship, & the Word.
- **Do not fast to be noticed by others** - Do it privately, not drawing attention to yourself. (Jesus talks about this in Matt. 6:16-18) There are corporate fasts, but even then don’t make a show of your self.

b) Practical Tips for Fasting

- **Have a clear goal for the Fast**
- **Prepare spiritually** (see previous section on spiritual tips) – repent, forgive, etc.
- **Decide what to Fast** (now review types of Fasts)

Partial Fast (example: Daniel 10): fruits & veggies only (no meat, sweets, breads) water only

Normal Fast: water only (this can last up to 40 days), consider health: pregnant, diabetic, etc.

Absolute Fast: only for short periods (1-3 days), depending on your health, consult medical

Specific Fast: giving up a specific food, drink, or activity for a period of time

- **Decide how long to Fast** - beginners work your way up, try 1 day every so often, then build to a 3 days, etc.

1 day (skip 2-3 meals) – good idea to go lunch to lunch

3 days

21 days (Daniel model – partial fast)

40 days (Jesus model & others)

- **What to expect during a Fast**

Don’t stock up before a fast, especially a longer one. In fact beginning to taper off leading up to a long fast is wise. You can expect headaches, irritability, hunger pains. Your body is probably having withdrawals from caffeine & sugar! Your body is detoxifying if you are going for several days. Get lots of rest & exercise more moderately. You may feel weakness or dizziness – especial with sudden adjustments in position. Be careful, move slowly, but hang in there!

- **How to end a Fast**

Don’t over eat, especially the longer the fast, your stomach has shrunk, build back up to eating slowly – small portions & snacks.