

WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM?
The Secret
Philippians 4:10-23

My trip to Africa was an eye-opening adventure. God allowed me to experience many things that I am still unpacking in my spirit. On this trip, I met people who were desperately poor compared to any of us in this room, yet they were filled with a joy and a sense of purpose that filled the air when I was with them. The most common sound that I heard while visiting with those pastors and children and schoolteachers and missionaries was LAUGHTER! I was in heaven. These precious people knew a SECRET that all of us should learn. It would save many of you from a MISERY that you are currently in bondage to in your own life.

The believers at Philippi were a very special people that knew this secret, and it enabled them to become a powerful example to all of the other churches that Paul helped to establish. They were also a huge source of encouragement to the old apostle himself as he went about doing the will of God in the world. Paul knew that these believers lived in abject poverty. They were from a region called Macedonia, and he talked about them when he wrote to other churches because of their amazing spirit. In fact, when the church at Jerusalem was going through severe poverty and persecution, Paul went about taking up money for them from other churches that he had helped to establish. But when he got to Macedonia, he was not going to ask them for money because they themselves were so destitute that they really qualified for aid. But they did not see it that way at all. Here is what they did: **2 Corinthians 8:1-5 NLT**

1 Now I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, what God in his kindness has done through the churches in Macedonia. 2 They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity. 3 For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will. 4 They begged us again and again for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem. 5 They even did more than we had hoped, for their first action was to give themselves to the Lord and to us, just as God wanted them to do.

That just speaks for itself! They “begged us again and again for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem!” That is just amazing. In spite of their financial struggles, they were still willing to GIVE SACRIFICIALLY to the man who had blessed them so much in their lives. How was this possible, and what are we to learn from their example?

I am so glad that you asked! The answer will radically change your life. You see, Paul taught them the SECRET to JOY that we need to grasp. This secret was not GENEROSITY, but this secret gave them the ability to BE generous even when they

were living in poverty. This SECRET ever reminded them that POVERTY was NOT their PROBLEM! This secret allowed them to always remember that God is bigger than their needs. This secret was something that Paul had modeled for them and taught to them. **Their secret was CONTENTMENT in CHRIST!** Their joy was NOT in their circumstances or in their finances. Their joy was rooted in something (really, in someone!) much greater and much more stable than pocketbooks and palaces. Contentment is DEFINED as “possessing enough to need no aid or support,” or “being independent of external circumstances.” When that ATTITUDE is ANCHORED IN GOD, it becomes the same mindset that allowed King David to write, “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want” in the 23rd Psalm! Contentment in Christ is a powerful secret to joy. What about you? Are you content? If not, then WHY not? What is keeping you shackled to your circumstances? Do you really believe that your joy needs to be dependent upon the house you live in or the car you drive or the amount of money that you have in the bank? What’s more, do you even believe that there could be another way to live? Paul did, and he taught the Philippians how to live out this secret. Paul taught that contentment is something that all people can be TAUGHT because . . .

Contentment is a mindset that can be learned!

Paul informs us that he had to LEARN how to deal with the up and down world of provision. He rode the rollercoaster like all of us do, but he did it with a right mindset. He did not expect the ups to stay up, nor the downs to stay down. He knew that God was in charge of the ride! **Philippians 4:11-12 NLT**

11 Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. 12 I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little.

Most people never think about the fact that we have to LEARN how to handle money and material possessions in our lives. We must learn not to become wasteful when we are in a time of blessing, and we must learn how to be frugal during lean times. And we must choose to be GRATEFUL AT ALL TIMES! We just naturally think that poverty is bad and that wealth is good, but that may not be true at times. Each of these financial seasons come with unique challenges, and you have to prepare your heart and mind to deal with them. This is why one writer in Proverbs said this:

Proverbs 30:7-9 NLT

7 O God, I beg two favors from you; let me have them before I die. 8 First, help me never to tell a lie. Second, give me neither poverty nor riches! Give me just enough to satisfy my needs. 9 For if I grow rich, I may deny you and say, "Who is the LORD?" And if I am too poor, I may steal and thus insult God's holy name.

Now, that is a man who is willing to see how he can get really messed up with a wrong mindset toward money! **Do you distrust your own ability to handle wealth or poverty?** Are you thinking that you would like to give handling wealth a shot? Be careful what you wish for! **God is the one who gives you the power to get (or not get) wealth, but contentment has to be ESTABLISHED in your heart no matter which one may be your lot!** So, how can we LEARN to be content no matter what our financial circumstances happen to be? The answer requires us to REVISIT a CONCEPT that we have seen throughout this little letter to the Philippians.

Contentment is a focus issue.

Every one of us needs to realize that our focus is helping to determine our attitude toward what we have and toward what we think that we need. A wrong focus will drive you away from contentment, and a right focus will drive you toward it. Let me ask you a simple question: How often do you think about and even obsess over what you DO NOT HAVE? That is a HUGE issue. Many of you do nothing but think about how awful your current car is or how shabby your clothes are or how much money you think that you should be making. Commercials drive you CRAZY! Some are driven by a spirit of COVETOUSNESS that resents the fact that OTHERS HAVE what they do not. Do you get jealous or even angry when your neighbor gets a raise and a new car? Why? You must ask yourself if you are always thinking about what others have in relation to what you WANT that you do not yet have. The bible calls this COVETOUSNESS, and it is a contentment-killer! As a result of these wrong mental mindsets, you are driven to spend all of your time striving to make more money so that you can have more stuff. Welcome to the RAT RACE! In a different letter, Paul pointed out the dreadful danger of this false focus.

1 Timothy 6:6-10 NLT

6 Yet true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. 7 After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave it. 8 So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content. 9 But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows.

A wrong focus on your WANTS will lead you to the trap of LOVING MONEY. Money is not the root of evil; the LOVE of money is the root of evil, because it makes money your source and your god. God forbid! **In contrast to that, a content person is willing to live WISELY and able to live SIMPLY.** This means that a right focus will lead you to avoid traps that come from striving for LUXURY as a LIFESTYLE! The surest indication that a man is caught in this trap is when he uses PLASTIC to live BEYOND his means. In Hebrews, Paul warns us to live within the limits of our current income level. **Hebrews 13:5 NLT**

5 Don't love money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, "I will never fail you. I will never abandon you."

In essence, Paul is instructing us to ACT OUR WAGE! You cannot max out your money, live beyond what you make on a regular basis, and stay healthy financially or spiritually. **Chronic debt for the sake of luxuries is a sign of DISCONTENT.** Now, I do not believe that all debt is evil. God allowed his people to lend and borrow money, but he NEVER desired for it to lead them into BONDAGE. Almost all of us have taken on debt to allow us to buy a home. This is acceptable if you do not try to take on a home that is more expensive than what your income can support. Be wise.

There is a practical way to remedy this dangerous focus. Learn to REFOCUS. First, you can do this by being willing to really focus on what others in this world around us DO NOT HAVE. We avoid this. We don't like to look beneath our income level to see how the "other half" is doing. **This is why so many people at CHC get upset with me when I ask how many wealthy people we have here. So, are YOU wealthy? If you will simply wake up and smell the coffee, you will realize that you are actually FABULOUSLY wealthy by world standards.** I have seen it on several continents in my lifetime. I saw it in Jamaica. I saw it just three weeks ago in Africa. As long as I live, I will never forget the stark poverty that I saw in Kabwe and Livingstone Zambia. I saw people living in some of the dirtiest, saddest conditions that I have ever witnessed. I saw people living in mud huts with thatch roofs and mud floors. I saw people who have to walk two hours just to get to a well where they can draw fresh water! That has caused me to pause and thank God for the fact that I can turn on a faucet in my own house whenever I want a drink! I also met a pastor named Gibson who WALKS THREE HOURS one way each Sunday in order to reach one of the churches where he pastors. He has a bike and – when he can ride it – he can get there in 1 hour and 45 minutes. His church is built of sticks, mud, and straw. Yet, he was filled with joy! I wonder, do you even grasp how someone can have JOY in circumstances like that? I saw it with my own eyes, and I know that it is a FOCUS issue. Let that proper focus lead you to a GRATEFUL spirit of CONTENTMENT! We are blessed. This reminds me that contentment is not JUST a focus issue. [\[Read Philippians 4:12-13 again.\]](#)

Contentment is a faith issue.

At its base, contentment is the mindset of one who TRUSTS that God loves them and is able to provide for them what they need. Now, this is not as simple as it may seem to some of us in the UNITED STATES. I had this experience in Zambia as well. **[Tell the story of my devotion at the cell group in the orphanage.]** I found myself unable to tell these orphans to be willing to give up their supper for something better. Who was I, an overfed, affluent American, that I had the right to give them such counsel? Thankfully, God used that lesson for ME more than for them. It forced me to answer the question: Do I believe what God's Word says?

Philippians 4:13 NLT

13 For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.

I realize that I am still learning this principle. And I must learn it and live it, because **contentment in Christ** is the secret to our joy. It allows us to rest in the power that God supplies us with when we are forced to suffer or go without for the sake of our faith. It takes the focus off of ME and puts it on HIM! This verse is often used to preach a “health and wealth gospel,” but it is nothing like that! Instead, it is a verse that reminds us that Christ’s power in us helps us to deal with the difficult realities of life without despairing. **Our consistent contentment in Christ in times of trouble or in times of prosperity is a SIGN of his presence within us to the lost world around us. But contentment is not only the secret to our joy; it is also the secret to our GENEROSITY.** Remember, these believers lived in abject poverty. Yet, they CONSISTENTLY gave sacrificial gifts for the Gospel over a period of many years, well beyond the sacrificial gift they gave to the church at Jerusalem. Paul refers to the fact that they sent one of their own (Epaphroditus) to bring him financial help when he was locked up in prison. They were the ONLY church to do so for him at times. **Philippians 4:18 NASB**

But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.

Paul speaks of their gift as if it was an offering that had been given in the temple directly to God. It was a fragrant aroma that brought pleasure to God. That is a beautiful picture of biblical generosity! Now, Paul was no slacker! He was a man who worked hard even while he went about as a missionary establishing churches. He had become a tentmaker by trade, so that he could earn his own way. He never charged churches a fee for his services (even though he made it clear in his letters that he did have the right to do so), but he determined that he would work with his own hands to make a living so that he would not be misinterpreted in his motives as he spread the Gospel. But now Paul was in prison, and he had no way to support himself while he was locked up, and the Roman prison was no palace! He could have remained forgotten and rotting in a prison cell, but he was not. **The Philippians did not simply pray for him; they “shared with him in his present difficulty.” (4:10)** This means that HIS burden became THEIR burden. When they sent their gift to him, it was like they entered that prison cell with him and stayed there with him to comfort him. **What a blessing!** Have you ever shared a burden with someone like that who was not your own flesh and blood? If you have, I promise you that you are like an ANGEL to the people whose burdens you helped to carry! You became the CHANNEL of divine provision for them. That also means that you are most closely connected to God the Father when you voluntarily share in the burdens of another. This is exactly what Christ did for us!

A proper faith-focus gives you the ability to WAIT on your WANTS and DISCIPLINE your DESIRES so that you can use your resources for more than just YOURSELF.

People of faith are able to budget their money so that it consistently goes to meet needs that help to display and distribute the Gospel. **When we do this, we open up the windows of heaven to flow THROUGH our wallets into the lives of others who have great needs.** What a blessing. This also enables us to experience God's obvious provision for our own needs once we allow those resources to flow through us! This is what Paul was talking about in **Philippians 4:19 NLT**

19 And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.

Think of it. Paul taught that we do not have to scrape and strive and fight for what we need. We can ASK the God of Heaven to provide for us what HE KNOWS that we NEED out of his riches, as we work contentedly day after day. It's sad, but we often live out the insanity that the Apostle James wrote about: **James 4:2-3 NLT**

2 You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it.

Oh, that we would choose to REJECT this faithless approach to getting what we need, and choose to ASK GOD for what we need and trust him to provide it. Then, we would experience the kind of contentment that can lead us to the heavenly provision that comes without strife. When God supplies your needs according to HIS glorious riches, you have found TRUE wealth. This is the note that Paul leaves the Philippians on in this beautiful letter. He has reminded them over and over of the source and strength of their joy that is found in a right focus on God. May we learn this and live it out in our own lives today!

Let's pray.