

4/3/22 “The Secret of Contentment”
Philippians 4:10–13

Good morning, if this is your first time here, my name is Adrian Garcia. I am the associate pastor of student ministries and missions here at Cornerstone.

We always tell our guests three things: First, we are grateful that you are here. We consider you to be God’s gift to us, so thank you for choosing to worship with us this morning.

Second, you’re in a place where the ground is level which means no one is any higher, better, or more significant than anyone else. The ground at the foot of the cross is level ground and we are all sinners in need of a Savior. And Jesus is that wonderful Savior.

While your salvation may be a personal matter, God never designed it to be a private matter. He wants us to live as brothers and sisters in the family of God.

Which leads to the third thing we have to tell you: And that is that we love you enough to speak the truth to you. And that is Truth with a capital T. The truth about God’s Word, about Jesus, His person, His works, and His words and how He will change your life from the inside out. He is the Cornerstone of our faith.

Contentment is a rare virtue, even among God’s people. Have you found yourself to be discontent at times? Discontent when it comes time to pay the bills, and you feel like you don’t make enough money. Discontent when your hard work goes unnoticed. Discontentment exists within families: husbands discontent with their wives, wives discontent with their husbands, parents with their children, and children with their parents.

When we consider what there is to be discontent about in the world, it is no wonder that Christian contentment is a rare virtue among God’s people. Andrew Davis opens his book with this illustration:

“In 1990, a farmer needed some water for his fields and stooped down to get it. The stone somehow caught his eye, and he scooped it up... There's no way the farmer could have known that he had just discovered the largest red diamond in history--13.9 carats in its rough form. All diamonds are rare, but red diamonds are the rarest of them all. That red diamond would eventually be cut into a triangular shape weighing 5.11 carats. It is now known as the Moussaieff Red Diamond, after the collector who purchased it in 2001. Its sale price was undisclosed, but estimates put its value as high as \$8 million.' This amazing red diamond is exceedingly precious. But an immeasurably more precious jewel to the Christian is *contentment*.” – pgs.11–12

In Philippians 4:10–13, using the occasion of the Philippians’ generosity, Paul presents three principles of Christian contentment.

Let’s read Philippians 4:10–13...

Based on Paul’s statement, “I’ve learned to be content... in any and every situation,” two observations come to mind: 1) Christian contentment is possible. 2) Christian contentment is not guaranteed. Paul says it’s a secret to be learned, and therefore Christian contentment must be pursued. My prayer this morning is that we will find our greatest joy in God and thus bring glory and honor to Him by being well content and thankful for every circumstance we face.

Beginning with Definitions

Before we dig into the text, it is essential to start with some working definitions of Christian contentment. As we look into this passage, I want us to have these definitions in our minds.

Jeremiah Burroughs “Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits and delights in God’s wise and fatherly disposal in every condition.” – The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment.

Andrew Davis “Christian contentment is finding delight in God’s wise plan for my life and humbly allowing Him to direct me in it.” – Power of Christian Contentment

Remember these definitions of contentment as we look to Paul’s teaching here in Philippians.

I. The Context for Contentment (v.10)

Although there were many reasons for Paul to write this letter, he is now shifting to one of the main reasons. He wanted to thank the Philippians for the gift they sent him by the hand of Epaphroditus (4:10, 14, 17; 3:25–30; 4:18). It had been ten years since Paul preached the gospel in Philippi (Acts 16). And when he departed to preach in other areas, the Philippians financially supported him (v.15–16). After some time, Paul was arrested and imprisoned, and from there, he wrote this letter (1:7, 12–20). This verse implies it had been some time since he heard from or received anything from the Philippians. Paul knew that the Philippians maintained a concern for him but lacked opportunity to show it. His imprisonment presented the occasion for their love to be demonstrated again.

Paul tells them **he rejoiced greatly in the Lord!** His heart was full of joy because of the Philippians' concern, thoughtfulness, and interest in him and his gospel ministry. His words show he genuinely appreciated the Philippians, and for the right reasons.

Paul wasn’t seeking their gift. Look to verse 17, “**Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account.**” Paul didn’t look at the Philippians and see dollar signs. He didn’t view the relationship as a means to an end. He didn’t value the Philippians by what they could give him. No, rejoiced in the Lord because of their friendship and partnership in the gospel. He was joyful because of their love for him and Christ. Additionally, Paul’s greater joy was for what the gift represented. He rejoiced in the Lord greatly because he knew that their gift would be a profit to their account.

A couple of weeks ago, while teaching out of Revelation 14, John Marc provided a community group question that led to 1 Corinthians 3:12–15. There it says, “**Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.”**

Paul didn’t rejoice because he had received a gift. He rejoiced because the Philippians were faithful to use their resources for the glory of God. The gift was evidence that they were building with gold, silver, and precious stones. It was proof that they were growing in sanctification as they looked forward to the day of Christ. And for this, they would receive a reward.

As Christians we should seek out opportunities to use the resources entrusted to their care in ways that glorify God. Jesus told us in Matthew 6:20–21, “**But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”**

As this passage indicates, the Philippians had a concern for Paul and his ministry for a while. They merely lacked an opportunity. But as one pastor put it: “Today, many Christians have the opportunities, yet they lack the concern. There is a connection between gospel generosity and Christian contentment. It’s as if they are two sides of the same coin. The more content we are, the freer we will be to use the resources God gives for His glory.

Paul uses this event to make that connection. He now presents three principles of Christian contentment. Incredibly, these aren’t abstract theological concepts for Paul. As we will see, he lived-out these realities. Being the faithful shepherd he was, Paul didn’t just preach these truths. He modeled them.

And for him to model this contentment, he had to learn it...

II. Contentment Must Be Learned (v.11)

Look at verse 11 with me... Paul tells us twice that he “learned” contentment in this section (v.11, 12). Enduring contentment wasn’t something Paul possessed immediately at conversion but instead was something he grew to understand. He needed to learn contentment, and his life experiences would be the providential classrooms for these lessons.

This abiding, supernatural contentment is a "secret" to be learned (4:12), not automatically understood. (Andrew Davis):

“Imagine a recruit to the US Army standing in line at boot camp, receiving his government-issued provisions as a new soldier--a stack of neatly folded clothing, topped off by a new pair of Army boots. Other things will be provided later. So it is with new converts to Christ: on the day of their justification, they receive full forgiveness of sins, adoption into the family of God, the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit, a secure place in heaven, inclusion in the body of Christ, and so forth. But the secret of Christian contentment "in any and every circumstance" not included in the original set of equipment.” – pg.28

Moreover, contentment is commanded, Heb 13:5 **“Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,”** Yet, many Christians go through their lives angry, anxious, arguing, bitter, coveting, demanding, murmuring, and complaining against God and His providential life circumstances. I confess I have personally struggled greatly in this area.

However, there is hope. It is possible to learn as Paul did, to reach the level of sanctification where we are sincerely content **"in any and every circumstance."** Contentment is a mark of a mature believer (ex: The amazing examples in Scripture, the qualifications of an elder; Paul’s instruction in 1 Tim 6:6–8). Contentment is something we all should be learning.

Interestingly, the word here for “content” is used outside of Scripture to refer to someone being self-sufficient. The Stoic philosophers embraced this word as a virtue. A person could be content by detaching from everyone and everything in life to be utterly unmoved by life. This Stoic self-sufficiency was achieved entirely by one’s own effort and resources.

Paul did not use the term in this way. He isn’t promoting a Stoic view of life. Paul is not advocating an emotionless, cold, and detached to people and circumstances. Paul was a man who cared immensely for people. Romans 9:1–3 **“I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.”** Paul didn’t detach from people and circumstances so that they wouldn’t cause him pain or heartache.

Also, he didn't encourage a rugged, pick yourself up by your bootstraps mentality. 2 Cor 12:10, **“Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”**

When he wrote on contentment, he chose a word linked to self-sufficiency. In doing so, he transformed it into a term for God-sufficiency, for Christ-sufficiency. It's a sufficiency in God that can only be accessed through Christ. Paul's contentment didn't come from within himself. He is not independent. Instead, he is entirely dependent.

His contentment didn't arise from his resources but came through the resources found only in Christ. This exalted view of Christ and our faith to access His resources are tested daily in God's providential purposes for our lives. It is there that the battle for contentment rages. Through running to Christ in these circumstances, we can legitimately learn contentment. As we will see in the next point, it's not just in the bad times but also in the good times. Christian contentment is not conditional...

III. Contentment is Not Conditional

Look at verse 12 with me... Changing circumstances did not affect the contentment Paul had. Paul speaks here of both difficult and favorable circumstances. He says he learned the secret of being content in any and every one of those. For context, let's review some of what Scripture records of the life of Paul.

Difficult Circumstances

1 Corinthians 4:9–13 **“For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor. To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now.”** (see also 2 Cor 11:24–28)

Reviewing this account is important because I know what our propensity is. I know how my own sinful heart can deceive me. *“Paul, you can't talk to me about contentment in every circumstance. You don't know what I have suffered. You don't know what I am suffering. You don't know what I have been through.”*

We are correct to say that Paul hasn't experienced what we have experienced. But the same could be said of us. We haven't experienced what Paul has experienced. Yet through these extremely difficult trials, he learned to be content and could write: these **“light and momentary afflictions are producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not to the things which are seen, but at the things we are not seen; for the things that are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”** (2 Cor 4:17)

Looking to the things not seen is to trust in the God who is in control of all things.

God's Providence and Promises

Sovereign

Psalm 139:16 **“Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them.”**

God decided when you would be born, who your parents would be, and your strengths and weaknesses. He determined your IQ, your athletic ability, and the features of your personality. He decided where you would be born, the community you would be a part of, your education, the career you would have, who you would marry, how many children you would have, what things you would achieve, how long you would live, and when you would die.

Wise

God's providence in our lives is perfectly wise. As Paul wrote in Romans 11:33–34, **“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?”** Paul bursts forth with praise thinking about the wisdom of God! He uses the words “depth” and “unfathomable.”

Ferdinand Magellan in 1521, trying to measure the depth of the Pacific Ocean. He spliced together six lengths of rope that he had on deck, tied them to a cannonball, and lowered it to a depth of four hundred fathoms (about 2,400 feet). The rope wasn't long enough to reach the bottom. Magellan called the ocean “un-fathomable,” immeasurably deep. He probably would have needed more than fifty lengths of rope to hit bottom almost four miles down. – Davis, pg. 37

Everything that God ordains is according to His perfect wisdom. It is the wisest course of action for His glory and our good.

Fatherly (Lovingly)

Matt 6:8 “So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.”

Ps 103:13 “Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him.”

No human father has ever shown greater tenderness or consideration or sacrificial love or deep affection for his children as God has for us. Everything that God wisely measures out and allows us to come into our lives comes from a heart of perfect love. When He brings pain into our lives it is only to refine us and make us more into the image of Christ.

This is a restful contentment. One that rests and delights in the all-satisfying presence of the Lord and Savior and rests in His sovereign, wise, and loving providence. Paul had learned the secret of accepting God's providence no matter what way it came. It was unconditional because it was based on his relationship to Christ and his understanding of God's providence. By grace through faith, life's trials can press us closer to the Lord, or unbelief can cause us to drift away from Him.

Favorable Circumstances

You might be thinking, “Paul? When did he experience abundance?” In Acts 13 we see Paul preaching the gospel on the island of Cyprus. And it there that he is welcomed into the courts of the Proconsul, Sergius Paulus, and it says that he came to believe. No doubt Paul and Barnabas would have been hosted by the proconsul and lavishly supplied by his means.

Or there was the time when Paul was being transported as a prisoner and shipwrecked on the island of Malta Acts 28. After being bitten by the snake and not dying the people take him to leading man of the Island, Publius, and Paul heals his sick father. The text tells us the Publius “entertained them courteously,” and “supplied us with all we needed.” (Acts 28:7,10) And remember Paul's interaction with Lydia in Philippi. She was the first convert in

that area and was a seller of purple fabrics. After being converted she insisted that Paul and his companions stay at her home. She would have hosted Paul out of the abundance of her supply.

Why does Paul mention the secret of being content in prosperity, being filled, and having abundance? We must understand that we need God's grace and strength as much when we experience prosperity as when we experience poverty. When life is comfortable, we are tempted to forget the grace of God and rely on ourselves and material things.

Prosperity has done more damage to believers than has adversity. "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' and you don't know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked" (Rev. 3:17)."¹

And not only are we prone to trust in our possessions rather than God, but Scripture also tells us that the **"eyes of a man are never satisfied."** (Pr 27:20) The wealthiest man at the turn of the 20th century, J.D. Rockefeller, worked tirelessly to acquire more and more wealth. At one point he owned 90% of all the oil industry in the United States. In regard to his wealth, someone asked, "How much is enough?" to which he famously replied, "Just a little bit more."

Much of our discontentment comes from selfishly pursuing our own goals, striving for our own glory, nourishing our own lusts. We were created in the image of God. Made to be His servants, to reflect His glory by doing His will. This is where true and lasting satisfaction is found. Yet, when we take our eyes off of Christ, we get disoriented and chase after vain things.

How do we learn contentment in prosperity? First, we need to remember that Jesus said, **"From everyone who has been given much, much will be required."** (Lk 12:48)

1 Tim 6:17–19 **"Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed."**

Because contentment can be lost in favorable times as well as difficult, the mark of a mature believer is the dependence upon Christ in every circumstance, in every situation, in all of life. Paul had learned contentment through the providential experiences God ordained for his life. In whatever circumstances he was in, he was there by divine appointment. If he was **hungry**, it was because God intended him to be hungry. If he was **full**, it was because the Lord purposes it. Because Christ was the One who strengthened him, in every circumstance he was content...

IV. Contentment Comes Through Christ

Read verse 13... Tragically, this verse is one of the most abused verses in all Scripture. Is this verse a blank check for believers to apply to any situation? I mean, it does say "all things." We've likely all seen it. It's the fourth quarter, two minutes to go in regulation, the ball is on the 80-yard line, the clock is ticking, and a touchdown wins the game. "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me!"

Is this what Paul was talking about here? No! The context shows that Paul is talking about contentment. There is no hint of this applying to Christians being strengthened to accomplish extraordinary athletic accolades. Yet, the

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, [The Bible Exposition Commentary](#), vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 97.

phrase “all things” does apply to more than contentment. The “all things” should be applied to all of the will of God as expressed in His Word.

All that God has commanded and called us to in His Word, He will supply us with His grace to accomplish. 2 Pet 1:3–4 **“seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.”**

This strengthening grace is found in the Word of Christ, and in the Person of Christ. Heb 4:16 **“Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”** In Christ, we can accomplish all that God desires of us. There is no shortage of grace available at the throne of grace. Christ is not a stingy Lord who withholds grace and empowerment from His people. No, but similar to the parable of the widow, which He used to teach the disciples that they ought to pray and not lose heart (Lk 18:1–8). The grace to sustain is there. The question is, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?

A Christian’s ability to grow in contentment comes from a conscious dependence upon the Lord and His power. The tangible expression is time spent with Him in the Word and through prayer. It is evidenced in a mind that meditates on His Word throughout the day. It is a humble daily dependence upon Him for all things.

Beyond that, in order for one to have contentment they need to truly value Christ. They need to know His surpassing worth above anything this world has to offer.

Jesus told a parable to teach us how much more valuable the kingdom of heaven is than everything we possess: **“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”** (Matt. 13:44).

Without taking the time to examine the treasure, the man would be deemed a fool. What if he never opened the chest, and on a sheer impulse sold everything to buy that field. The parable only makes sense if the Lord expects us to evaluate the treasures of salvation.

What do these include? Full forgiveness of all our sins, imputation of Christ's perfect righteousness, adoption into the family of God, the indwelling Holy Spirit, a guaranteed inheritance in heaven, fellowship with brothers and sisters from every nation on earth, a lifetime of worthwhile works to do for his glory, a future resurrection body, and everlasting spiritual treasures for eternity! How incredible are the mercies of God! The more we take inventory of this wealth, the more we will realize that Christ is the sum of all these treasures. And in Christ we find the secret of contentment and the more we content we will become. – Davis