



Philippians 4:6-8 **Be Content This Christmas**

Summary: Christmas can fill us with anxiety, depression, and greed, but God promises we can find contentment today in Christ.

Christmas Eve is just one week away. We are in the thick of what has come to be known as the "Christmas Season." But, based on many conversations I've had recently, it seems like things are a little hectic and frustrating for both kids and adults at this time of year. It seems some people are fighting what we might call a Christmas resentment. You hear the song Silent Night, Holy Night, and it sounds nice, but it's nothing like what you're living right now. Well, I want to talk to you this morning about how to reset Christmas, how to kick the anxiety and the restlessness and fight against the materialism that creeps in like a thick blanket of smog covering the beauty of the season.

Many years ago, the apostle Paul sat in a Roman jail, and wrote words that seem to speak directly to our modern experience of Christmas. He told his friends there:

Philippians 4:6 Be anxious for nothing, 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 minds through Christ Jesus.

He then went on to say, just a few sentences later:

Phil 4:11 ... I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

Think about that. A man, in jail, is writing to his friends on the outside and saying things like "be anxious for nothing." He is telling *them* of "the peace of God." He is telling them about guarding your heart, and being "content." And he's the one in jail!

Imagine what your life would be like if you could just slow down a little bit, relax, take control, and be content.

Really content.

Not anxious. Not stressed out, burned out or frustrated. Not consumed with plans for the next step or worried whether you've forgotten any steps. Stable, secure, unmovable, unshakeable. Content. At peace. Well, if it's possible for a man in a Roman jail, it's possible for you.

But you need to note: Paul says he **learned** the secret. And this kind of learning is something you have to work on applying over and over, it's not a sudden ah-ha moment, and it's a perishable skill.

I had a friend for many years who made the best tortillas – the absolute best, and she offered many times to teach me how to make them, “but” she would say, “you have to commit to making them.” It's something you have to learn the *steps of*, but then you also have to learn the *feel of* it by repeated experience.

That's like what Paul is saying here – he has learned how to apply the secret of being content in Christ in a variety of settings and under every possible condition.

If we are going to have the same thing this Christmas, and we should, there are a few things we need to know. If you're taking notes this morning I want to give you three to remember.

1. Contentment is not found by getting more OR in having less.

Friends, contentment is not tied to the number of gifts you get this Christmas, or to the value of the gifts you get. Contentment is not tied to your net worth, whether it's high or low. There are poor people who are discontent and rich people who are discontent.

Paul is VERY intentional about showing how comprehensive his contentment is. He says he has learned to be content in “[whatever state I am](#)” (vs 11)...whether [abased](#) (having nothing) [or abounding](#) (having everything), whether feasting or starving... [I can do ALL things through Christ!](#)

So, part of the secret to being content is to realize that *you **can** have it all, **if** all you desire is Christ.*

But, as we try to be satisfied in Christ alone, the entire world of marketing and advertising and peer envy levels its cannons at us. That's true all year long, but they amplify their force and volume to nearly overwhelming levels at Christmas. Nearly all of their advertisements and commercials are intended to give us the impression that if we only had their product, or their experience, our lives would be better, our jobs would be easier, and our hearts would be fuller, our lives less boring, even our teeth would be whiter. And all of that leads to being content, right? They know the problems of our lives and they've got the solutions. All we need is what they're selling.

Now, of course, advertising and commercials and their tricks have been around for a while, but for the past ten years we've been under attack from another direction as well. I don't know if you've been following this, but there is growing body of evidence that social media, which is intended to make us feel connected to one another, actually has a dangerously depressing effect on most people.

You see, we all know how miserable and ordinary most of our lives are, so the only thing that makes it online are the peaks, the exciting moments and big deals – when we have a

great experience, we can't wait to post it. But, the danger is that we go online and all we see from other people is the intentionally edited and cropped version of what they want us to see which is depressing because it makes it look like everyone else is always having fun.

To varying degrees, and for a variety of reasons, social media either gives us a chance to boast about something that has gone really well, or to see how much better other people are doing than us, and it all breeds discontentment. We see what they're getting for Christmas. We see how well they decorate. We see how much fun their trip is. And discontent creeps in and begins choking our joy.

Everyone else already has a..., or everyone else is going to..., or everyone else has already.... Why haven't I? So guard your heart this Christmas, and spend more time unplugged, offline, engaged with the people around you.

But listen, while you're offline, don't think "I'd be more content if I just got rid of stuff."

There's been a minimalist movement going on for some time now, and even one Japanese designer by the name of Marie Kondo encouraging people to get rid of everything you don't "absolutely love" in your life.

Well, getting rid of stuff may be a practical step to clear up clutter in your life, but if you're going to throw stuff out or downsize, remember to do it FOR JESUS, to do it SO THAT you can be a better steward by managing less stuff, and not simply because you think having less will suddenly make you happy. Remember, Paul said he knew how to be content *while abounding*.

If you don't fill the empty place you just made with Jesus, sooner or later it will fill back up with more stuff, or you'll wind up worshipping your minimalist, clutter-free life.

A much better attitude is that which Paul expressed to Timothy

1 Timothy 6:6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain. **7** For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out.

You don't need to have more, do more, or be more, and you don't need to have less – you need Jesus, and you need to be content in Him, right here and now. Which brings us to our second point:

2. Contentment is an experience in the present, not a promise for the future. And that means you can be content right here, right now, there's no need to wait for Christmas Eve or Christmas Day when you receive some gift you're really hoping for.

You see, here's the problem: when most people feel a lack of contentment, satisfaction, or fulfillment with the ways things are, we begin looking around for what we think we're missing.

And most often it's turns out to be a THING we think need. It could be little toy made in China, or it could be a special Christmas dinner served in a beautifully decorated home, or a thousand other things. But we tell ourselves, as soon as I have that, achieve that, receive that, earn that, everything is going to be great. Contentment, happiness, satisfaction, wholeness is out there somewhere hiding behind some thing or some point in the future.

It's easy to see this in the kids – they're making wish lists and telling you what they want for Christmas all the time. But it's not just the kids – it's the teens and the singles and the adults too. And as you grow a little older and have a little money for your self, you have the opportunity so say, "I got this for myself for Christmas." Or my birthday, or whatever the excuse or occasion may be. But the underlying motive is still the same, we're looking to "stuff" or things or experiences thinking they will make our life better, our heart more content because *we believe that contentment is out there somewhere, not in here already.*

And there's a terrible secondary effect to all of that: when we look to other people to provide the things we think need we wind up hurting our relationships in the process. So now if you don't get me what I want, I get upset with you. Or if you don't reciprocate with an equivalent gift to the one I got for you, I get upset with you. Or if you don't respond the way I was hoping you would to the gift I gave, I get upset with you.

If I can be open and real for a minute here, I'll tell you, it's one of the hardest things for me about being a pastor: you can have all these people looking for a certain "Christmas" feel or experience and you don't want to let them down. Christmas and Easter have come to feel like Superbowl Sunday for the church – but here's the funny thing: none of that pressure is coming from Christ. There's nothing in the Bible that says we have to celebrate Christmas!

We've made a lot of it up through the years. And that's OK. Christmas can be good, it can be wonderful. I love a tree and lights and Christmas music. But not if we lose sight of Christ while we pile on all the accessories. If you want to have a helpful exercise, ask yourself what parts of the "Christmas Season" could you do without and still have Christmas? That will show, pretty quickly, what the essence of the season is for you.

Remember, Paul says we can be fully content – right here, right now – whether we get a little or a lot this Christmas, whether things are going well, or whether the roof of our life is caving in. Contentment is not a promise for the future; it's an experience for the present.

And in order to put that into practice, we have to see our third point this morning:

3. Contentment comes from magnifying the right Thing.

If Contentment is not found by having more or less, and it's not a promise for the future, it's an experience for the present; that means that I can have total and complete, honest and real contentment NOW. How do I do that? By magnifying the right Thing.

Contentment is a function of focus. What are you centered on? What are you staring at?

The apostle Paul was a man who had a lot going for him. He was born into a good family, got a good education, had an outstanding early career; earlier in this letter Paul lays out his credentials, his resume, all the stuff he could brag about and he says, "You can have it. It's worth nothing to me. Just give me Jesus."

He didn't say I can do all things through my stuff. Or, because I have the best understanding of what is happening and what should be done next. Or because I have the best connections and network. No, Paul said the key to his contentment was abiding in Jesus.

THAT is the key to rising above your circumstances. THAT is what keeps you from holding on too tightly to your condition or wanting to run too quickly from your condition. Paul knows he's in prison, he knows he might die, but he says it's fine. He's content in Christ.

If Paul were to focus on his situation, he'd probably be down and depressed, but he's not. He's focused on Jesus.

And that's the answer for us too. When you're tempted toward discontentment, turn to thanksgiving.

When your kids make a mess of the house, instead of griping about the mess, praise God that you are able to provide for them. And then ask God how He might want to also use you to bless the truly poor.

When your boss frustrates you, praise God for the fact that you have a job, and you can earn a paycheck, and thank Him for this chance to learn how to love and serve someone who isn't that lovely; after all, that's how He loves us.

When your spouse irritates you, think of something they do well, and thank God for it, and then go and tell them how much you appreciate it too.

Get your attention off of the bad stuff and transfer it to the good. And if you can't find anything else, thank God for the cross. Thank Him for your salvation. Thank Him that no matter how bad things may get, at least you are saved and it won't be like this forever.

Contentment is found by magnifying the right thing, and the right thing is Jesus. As Paul goes on to say,

Phil 4:13 I can do all things, through Christ Jesus who strengthens me.

Do you know Him? Is He the center of your life? Is He the organizing principle for everything else – determining what can stay and what must go, and in what order?

Or are you struggling to find happiness and peace in this life because you don't know the author of life?

Why not come to Him this morning? Find your fulfillment in Him. Receive what He has done for you, and give yourself to Him. Tell Him that He is sufficient for your every need, and that He is what you've really been searching for all along.

And then keep doing that, every time you struggle with contentment, because you will, for the rest of your life. But the answer never changes, it's always Jesus.

Whether He gives you much, or gives you little, whether things are fine or your life feels like a train wreck, you'll be OK as long you keep Christ first this Christmas and all year.

Let's pray.