



Philippians 4:10-13 The Secret of Being Content

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro
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Each year in mid-December our house fills with anticipation – there are a lot of packages and boxes coming and going, but we’re all on the lookout for one- **the one** - the box with a return address of Red Bluff, California where my grandpa lives. Because inside that box are baggies of my grandma’s cookies and gallon sized zip lock bags of my Grandpa’s caramel popcorn. We only get it once a year, and it’s like little puffs of gold; the only thing that helps you restrain yourself when eating it is the knowledge that you have a limited amount and once it’s gone, it’s gone.

Many of you know what’s like to receive a care package or a gift from home. To open that box and slowly, eagerly, take out each object that was placed inside, every one of them picked for a reason by someone who loves you.

The Apostle Paul is writing Philippians because he had received a gift from the church in Philippi – a church he had started. But now Paul is a prisoner in Rome, waiting to make an appeal to the Emperor which is either going to result in his acquittal, or quite possibly, his execution. It’s kind of a nice time to receive a little care package. So, a man named Epaphroditus brought the gift from Philippi to Rome – a journey of over 800 miles. During the trip he became deathly ill and now that he had recovered, Paul was sending him home with this letter that we are reading as an official thank you note.

He, like us, is genuinely thankful for what he has received – he sincerely appreciates the gift, the effort it took to get it to him, and the love that it represents.

[10](#) But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity.

Paul says, “You know, I was so blessed to receive what you sent. You guys have sent me stuff before in the past, and I know you’ve been wanting or meaning to do it again, you just haven’t had the chance, and I’ve been a little hard to track down lately. So again, thank you, I really appreciate your generosity.”

And then he takes a really interesting turn:

[11](#) Not that I speak in regard to need, for 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. [13](#) I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

This verse gets misused and taken out of context all the time, so it's important for us to really understand what Paul is saying, and that is, as long as he has Jesus, he has all he really needs.

Paul says he can do all things through Christ Jesus – but what kind of things? Here is where people tend to go wrong – they want nitro-Jesus who can help them get whatever they want. I can do everything, because I've got Jesus.

That kind of a perspective is all wrong – it puts us in the driver's seat, when really, that position belongs to God. We can only claim to be able to do all things **in Christ** when we are doing all things **as unto Christ**. *He gives us the strength to do what He commands us to do*, not simply to fulfill our whims.

And what does that lead to in Paul's life? Being content.

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

Content.

Really content.

At peace. Not ignorant, not unaware, not lazy or unwilling to get involved – active, engaged, alert, but content.

Not anxious, not stressed out, not burned out or frustrated, not consumed with plans for the next step. Content. What would that be like?

It would be like being in control. Being able to intentionally act instead of being forced to react all the time. Stable, secure, unmovable, unshakeable.

How do we get there? Well, we need to note that Paul says he has **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.

Rose makes the best tortillas, and she has offered to teach me how to make them, "but 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* 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, 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 having less.

Paul is VERY intentional about showing the expansive nature of his contentment. He says he has learned to be content in “whatever state I am...whether abased (having nothing) or abounding (having everything), whether feasting or starving...I can do ALL things through Christ!” Contentment is not tied to net worth, whether it’s high or low. There are poor people who are discontent and rich people who are discontent.

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

But, as we try to be satisfied in Christ alone, the entire world of marketing and advertising levels its cannons at us. Nearly all of their advertisements and commercials are intended to give us the impression that if we only had their product, or their politician, our lives would be better, our jobs would be easier, and 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.

My father-in-law loves to point out – the happiest people in the world are those in beer commercials. All their friends are good looking, everybody is all smiles, no one fights or argues, unless it’s about their favorite team, and they can eat whatever they want without getting fat. There are no consequences in beer commercials, everyone seems content!

Now, of course, advertising and commercials and their tricks have been around for a while, what about something new? Did you know there’s been a growing realization that social media, which is intended to make us feel connected to one another, actually has a dangerously depressing feel to it most of the time?

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 – and when we have a great experience, we can’t wait to post it. So, 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.

Or, everyone else already has a..., or everyone else is going to..., or everyone else has already.... Why haven’t I?

To varying degrees, and for a variety of reasons, using 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.

And I’ll tell you who is suffering the most from it all, is the ladies. Perhaps because they have long been stereotyped as the more social of the sexes anyway, but several major studies have been showing lately, women are much more likely than men to be using social media. For a long time the idea has been that younger people were more likely to be online than older people, but now it’s being shown that gender is also a very important factor and one that cuts across age.

Writing about a study conducted by the Nielsen group recently, an article from The Atlantic said, “The ladies aren’t just more likely to buy stuff online; they’re more likely to *be* online in the first place. They’re more likely to blog. They’re more likely to be on Facebook or Twitter. They’re more likely, in general, to represent themselves as digital personas.”¹

According to a survey conducted in February by Pew – women average 11 FB updates a week, men only half that with 6.

And all of that updating and checking in on others is creating a lot of discontentment. I read a blog just this week entitled “Competitive Mothering”² in which the author was pointing out the dangers of spending too much time reading blogs run by seemingly supermoms who have already done everything you’re trying to get around to on Pinterest while raising five perfect children and being a mini-Martha Stewart. And every time you read one of their posts you sink deeper and deeper into discontentment feeling like you’re just not good enough and your husband and your kids are suffering for it.

Or you see how much fun your friends are having with the guy they’ve met and you keep wondering, where is my Mister Right?

Ladies, you must guard your hearts when you go online. And if you are struggling with it, maybe you need to put it all down for a while, walk away, and rejoice in Jesus and what He has already given you instead of pining for what you don’t have yet or can’t seem to manage.

And while we’re all offline, don’t think “I’d be more content if I just got rid of stuff.” Getting rid of stuff may be a practical step you can take 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. Paul said he knew how to be content while abounding.

If you don’t fill that 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.

¹ <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2012/04/the-digital-gender-divide-women-are-more-likely-than-men-to-have-a-blog-and-a-facebook-profile/256466/> Accessed May 26, 2012.

² <http://www.challies.com/christian-living/competitive-mothering> Accessed May 26, 2012.

It's where you're headed that is ultimately important, not what you bring with you.

You don't need to have more, do more, or be more, or to have less – you need Jesus, and 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

When we realize that we are not content, not satisfied, not fulfilled with the ways things are, we respond in several different ways.

- a. We blame our stuff. It's my car. If I had a newer car, or if I had a car in the first place, then I would be content. Look around yourself and ask how many of your friends think life will be good as soon as they get that Prius or BMW? Mady and I were just talking about this this past week – getting your Beamer seems to be an entitlement and a right of passage around here. And when you finally pull up in one, you know you have arrived and you have something to be proud of, for a little while. We can do the same thing with our neighborhood, our clothes, even our phone. As soon as I get that new thing, and get rid of my current one, then I'll be content.
- b. We blame people. The problem is my boss. If he or she wasn't in the way I could really get some things done around here and shine. Or my spouse, or my parents, or my boyfriend or girlfriend – if the other people in my life could just get it together I could finally be what I want to be. Christians can even develop this attitude about their church: this place isn't doing it for me anymore; I need to find something better, something that meets more of my needs.
- c. We blame ourselves – I need to try harder, I should have done better, I need another degree. If I work hard enough and improve myself enough, I'll be able to get what I'm after and then I'll be content.
- d. We blame the system – we become cynical, “I used to believe that things would work out, I used to think it was all going to be OK, but I've come to realize that's just not the way things work.” I'm not as idealistic, but it's only because I'm realistic. You just suck it up and press on. Just look out for you and yours because no one else is going to, and make the best of what you can until you can get out of here.

What all of these views have in common is the unstated belief that if contentment can be found, it's out there somewhere – it's not here. And if you can actually articulate what you think might be the key to realizing your contentment, you place your hope and expectation in it, and it becomes an idol. You worship it instead of God. You don't look to the Second Coming, you look to the coming of your thing – your person, your position, your payment, your whatever. When that thing or that person arrives, so will your happiness.

But that's not what Paul says. Paul says we can be fully content – right here, right now – whether we have a little or have a lot, 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 (not the wrong ones)

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 really 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?

We've already seen in Philippians that Paul says, you can have my credentials, you can have my resume, you can have my stuff – just give me Jesus. He didn't say I can do all things through my stuff. I can do all things because I've held the right positions at the right time. Because I have the perfect combination of education and experience. 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 Jesus.

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

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 that you don't live in a garbage dump in India or the Philippines, and ask God to bless those who really do, that they would have all their needs met in Christ.

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 that 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, He is the one who enables you to “do all things, through Christ Jesus who strengthens [you].”

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

Or is the reason you’re 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? Whether you’ve never invited Him into your life, or whether you have become distracted by other things – I’m asking, please, why don’t you take a moment this morning and 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 really what you’ve 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 you’re in the midst of a hurricane, you’ll be just fine as long you keep Him first.