**Contentment: How to get it?**

*Philippians 4:10-12*

**Context**

Would you say you are a contented person? If we were honest, I think most of us would say that we need improvement.

Contentment is one of those qualities that often seems quite elusive in life. What seems to be the determinant of how content we are is largely based on our circumstances. “If I have more, I’ll be more content.”

Interestingly, the scriptures not only identify contentment as a virtue, but speaks of it as a command.  To be content is not an optional position. It is required of us as Christians. Honestly, we have no reason not to be content because we should understand that an eternal, utterly capable and supernaturally resourceful God will never leave us or forsake us.

**Hebrews 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,”*

Not only do we have the assurance of His presence, but we also have the assurance as believers, that our position in Him is secure and everlasting.

**Romans 8:35-38**—*Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?****36****Just as it is written, “For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”* ***37****But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.****38****For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,****39****nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Paul tells us in this portion of scripture that he has learned the secret to being content. He also says that godliness and contentment are a means of great gain.

**1 Timothy 6:6***—But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment.*

His contentment here is in the context of thanking the Philippian church for their gift. He is expressing at some length his gratitude to them for their kindness. The gift came at the hand of Epaphroditus who delivered it to him. Although we do not know what the gift was (perhaps money, food, clothing), we do know that it was generous.

Additionally, when Paul is writing this, he is a prisoner chained to a Roman soldier. He is in isolation and unable to move about freely. That would clearly put him in a very needy position.

That said, beneath the surface of the expression of thanks is a contented person because of who he is in Christ and the comfort that comes from the Spirit that goes way beyond his circumstances.

**How do we genuinely live contently?**

1. **Genuinely understand God’s providence**

**Philippians 4:10***—But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity.*

1. Context: 10 years prior, Paul had established the Philippian church; a gift was given then as well. It was also when Paul was jailed and an earthquake released he and other prisoners. The Philippian jailer and his household out of it believed in Jesus. Paul then went to Thessalonica and support was given. Paul loved them; they loved Paul. There does not seem to be another other support during the 10-year period, but they did not have opportunity. It was not because they were not concerned.
2. *Opportunity (kairos)—*season, not chronological time, but moment in time
   1. The text does not give us why it was not the right opportunity
   2. Perhaps they didn’t have the financial means; or the needs weren’t known; or they didn’t know where he was
   3. Paul wasn’t upset or bitter with them; he wasn’t holding it against them
3. He did rejoice greatly when the concern for him was known
4. *Revived—*horticultural term meaning to bloom again
   1. *Y*our love has flowered again
   2. It’s always been there but just didn’t have the opportunity to bloom
5. **Point:** Paul was confident in God’s providence waiting patiently until His sovereign hand would bring it about
   1. With such a mindset, you don’t have to be anxious
   2. You don’t have to manipulate
   3. You don’t have to panic
   4. You do what God requires of you and you rest in His timing and His ways
   5. You will never learn to be content without believing in His sovereignty

**Ephesians 1:11-12**—*In Him****11****also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,****12****to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.*

1. *What is Providence?* 
   1. *God provides; He orchestrates everything to accomplish His purpose*
   2. *God acts in the world:*
      1. *Miracles—supernatural events that have no natural explanation—food from nothing (feeding the 5000), resurrections (Lazarus), healings (lame man), etc.*
      2. *Providence—God taking all the ordinary events in life and orchestrating them to accomplish His own purpose (Joseph, Ester, Ruth, etc)*

**Romans 8:28-29***—And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.****29****For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren*

1. **Application:** you will never know a contented heart until you believe that a sovereign God is ordering everything for your good and His glory. That truth must constantly resonated with you. As long as you feel things are out of control and you have somehow have to do something to control them, it will always be a problem. And you will be incredibly frustrated in the process.
2. You do what God requires of you—working hard to please Him and at the same time, content that God is in control of the results.
3. **Genuinely be content with little**

**Philippians 4:11***—Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.*

1. *Not that I speak from want*—disclaimer that I didn’t necessarily need it, but rejoiced when your gift came
   1. Why didn’t he need it?
   2. Because he has learned to be content in any circumstance
2. He was therefore satisfied with little
   1. That does not mean that his need was not great or deep
   2. Nevertheless, he did not acknowledge any discontent
3. He was at peace
   1. In spite of his incarceration
   2. In spite of his chains
   3. In spite of his circumstances
4. **Application:** We could rightly say we live in a culture that is discontented. It is constantly striving for more. And the more we have the more discontented we seem to be.
   1. We have to satisfy our needs, cravings, desires
   2. What are those needs? Who establishes them?

**1 Timothy 6:6-10**—*But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment.****7****For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either.****8****If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.****9****But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction.****10****For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*

1. Paul was content because he was so satisfied with little (**v11**)
2. He could have asked of them

**1 Corinthians 9:11-12**—*If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?****12****If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.*

**1 Thessalonians 2:9***—For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.*

**2 Corinthians 11:8-9***—I robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve you;****9****and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so.*

1. I have learned—implies that he “has this lesson down”
   1. “Content” here has the same meaning as sufficient

**2 Corinthians 9:8**—*And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed*

* 1. He is sufficient, self-contained, I have no needs that are not met

1. **Application:** we live in a culture that sells the idea that you are discontented. You need this. You deserve this. You owe it to yourself. You work hard and are entitled to it.
   1. Part of the problem is we confuse needs with wants
   2. Christians are not content with having their needs met
   3. They are trying hard to have their wants met
   4. “Our wants always exceed our needs” - Jack MacArthur
2. **Genuinely live independent of circumstances**

**Philippians 4:11-12***—Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.****12****I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.*

1. In whatever circumstances
2. I know how… (multiple times)
   1. To get along with humble means
      1. Physical things—food, clothing, daily necessities
      2. Poverty; how to be poor
   2. To get along with prosperity
      1. Overflow (perisseu)—to abound, to be filled
      2. Physical things again—earthly goods
3. The “secret”
   1. Secret (chartz)—has the idea of foddering animals; feeding and fattening animals
   2. I know what it means to have a big meal and eat well
   3. I know what it means to means to go hungry
4. A faithfulness in God’s promises vs. being a victim of circumstances
   1. You cannot be a “victim of circumstances” and at the same time believe the sovereignty of God
   2. You either believe that His providential hand is working or you are target of unfortunate events

**Luke 6:21***—Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.*

1. Paul understood hardships

**Acts 14:19***—But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.*

**Acts 16:22***—The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods.*

**Acts 17:13**—But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the *word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there as well, agitating and stirring up the crowds.*

**Acts 18:12-13***—But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat,****13****saying, “This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.”*

**Acts 20:3***—And there he spent three months, and when a plot was formed against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.*

**2 Corinthians 4:11***—For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.****12****So death works in us, but life in you.*

**2 Corinthians 6:*4-5****—*…*but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses,****5****in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger*

**2 Corinthians 11:23-30***—Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death.****24****Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes.****25****Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep.****26****I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren;****27****I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.****28****Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches.****29****Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?* ***30****If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness.*

**Conclusion**

Paul understood difficult circumstances yet lived above them. To do so is an essential piece of being content. I pray that we will: 1) genuinely understand God’s providence 2) genuinely be content with little and 3) genuinely live independent of circumstances

**Colossians 3:2-4***—Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.****3****For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.****4****When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.*

**2 Corinthians 4:17-18***—For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,****18****while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*