

## **Rotting Bones or Contentment?**

Contentment in contrast to Envy 7 Deadly Sins  
Pro 14:30; Phil 4:10-13; I Timothy 6:6-12

Do you know what the best solution to climate change, global warming, ecological issues and such concerns is? Any guesses?

The answer: **Stop buying stuff.** One example is a 2018 statistic: the average Canadian consumer throws out an estimated 170 kilograms of food a year. That's like taking one fourth of every grocery store purchase and throwing it away as we walk out the store. The report released by the Commission for Environmental Cooperation, an environmental agency set up under the North American Free Trade Agreement, found when including all stages of the food supply chain, 396 kilograms of food per person is wasted in Canada every year. That's a 31 billion dollar problem.

But if we stopped buying stuff, this would cause great economic problems because 70% of our economy depends on us buying stuff. When you think about it, this just tells us how sick we are as a culture and society. The reality is, we all live in a world that promotes dissatisfaction with our lives. And **it's wasteful.** Plus notice how different sectors of our lives interact. Covetousness, buying stuff, envy, the economy, wastefulness, ecological concerns tie together.

But we are constantly bombarded with newer and better things that promise to make our lives more complete if only we would obtain them! If we listen to the world, we will always be comparing the lifestyles and possessions of others with our own, and we will always be dissatisfied. Advertisements focus on, "we deserve this," and "we will be cool if we have that," and "it's just low monthly payments."

I suspect some of you have had this kind of experience. I took one look at river cruises down the Mississippi. To my immense surprise, within an hour, wherever I went on line – there was an advertisement for a Mississippi cruise. They are so good at this that one TV

news channel I watch through the computer, adjusted its opening advertisements to – cruises on the Mississippi River. This channel has never done that before. Big brother is real!

Back in 1990, when we returned from Brasil, one of the biggest culture shocks was – all the storage sheds & storage units. It still astounds me. I have to ask, what are we storing stuff for? We don't park our cars in our garages anymore. Why? Because they are full of stuff!

Short term storage at times makes sense. It was not unusual as I met people on my last trip to the States for them to ask me if I was putting my household stuff in storage. I haven't. A storage unit makes sense if one lives in a small place and wants to store something like a kayak that you use frequently. But I've had people ask me to help them pay their storage fees, so they can afford their prescription medicine. That's a time to make a tough choice.

The sermon title comes from Proverbs 14:30 which says, "A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy, covetousness, rots the bones." Contentment is the counter to envy.

Historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., observed that American society is marked by "inextinguishable discontent." Even in Canada our quest is better and what is next. We want a better job with better pay and a better boss. We want better relationships and a better car and a better backhand in tennis or a longer drive in golf. We have a propensity to live endlessly for the next thing - the next weekend, the next vacation, the next purchase, and the next experience. We are never content, never satisfied, and envious of those who have what we have not attained or accumulated.

So we have to intentionally work at countering envy with contentment. I think we can agree that we are so pressed to be discontented, covetous, & envious, that we have to deliberately, purposefully, & calculatedly find ways to help us be content. **It's a learned virtue.** We are not born with this virtue. So how do we do this?

The apostle Paul wrote, "I don't say this out of need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am" (Phil. 4:11). How could he make such a bold statement? Because he knew that contentment lies not in what he had, but in whose he is. When Paul wrote these words he was in Nero's prison in Rome. Paul had enjoyed power and status among his people until he became a follower of Jesus. He was raised in the lap of luxury. But he was deprived of many of life's barest necessities and faced immense hardship and persecution. Yet he could happily say, "*I am content.*"

When we have a relationship with God through his Son, Jesus Christ, we understand whose we are and what we have. A lack of contentment causes us to look horizontally - at what others have so we are never satisfied. Contentment invites us to look vertically - at God. When we look in our Creator's direction, regardless of our possessions or lack of or status or lack of whatever, I know that the Almighty is enough.

A man once went to a minister for counseling. He was in the midst of a financial collapse. "I've lost everything," he moaned.

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear you've lost your faith."

"No," the man corrected, "I haven't lost faith."

"Well, then I'm sad to hear that you've lost your character."

"I didn't say that," the man corrected. "I still have my character."

"I'm sorry to hear you've lost your salvation."

"That's not what I said," the man objected. "I haven't lost my salvation."

The minister noted, "You have your faith, your character, & your salvation. Seems to me, you have lost none of the things that really matter."

John Stott wrote, "Contentment is the secret of inward peace. It remembers the stark truth that

we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it. Life, is a pilgrimage from one moment of nakedness to another. So we should travel light and live simply. Our enemy is not possessions, but excess. Our battle cry is not 'Nothing!' but 'Enough!' We've got enough. Simplicity says, if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that."

An old story of praying like a Puritan goes: He sat down to a meal of bread & water. He bowed his head and declared, "All this and Jesus too!"

A constant **Old Testament warning** to the Hebrews and to us goes: When you get into the land of Promise – get established & receive the things you want and the blessings of Yahweh, don't forget the God who led you out of slavery – simply to have a new kind of slavery – stuff, envy, wastage, and discontent.

In the resource from Mennonite Church Canada for this series as they call it, Snakes & Ladders, or as more commonly known as the Cardinal or Deadly Sins and Virtues we are given these two titles: Envy – Feeling bitter when others have it better. And Contentment: **Loving what is right in front of you.** This says it well.

And we must add, for the follower of Jesus: Contentment knows that if we have Jesus we have enough. Jesus is sufficient. Contentment comes when we can honestly say with the apostle Paul, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know both how to have a little, and I know how to have a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret [of being content] - whether well-fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:12-13).

Please spend this week contemplating the meaning of, as well as, and how to live the following. Contentment comes upon us and fills us as the apostle Paul tells Timothy and us, "**godliness with contentment is great gain.**"

What is the great gain?

## Sermon insert?

### Key verses and phrases to counter envy and build up contentment.

Did we ever think that a green response, an ecological response is to stop buying stuff and not waste stuff?

Love what is in front of us.

See God at work in our challenges, transforming them into moments of contentment.

Proverbs 14:30: "A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy, (covetousness) rots the bones."

I have learned to be content in what ever circumstances I am" (Phil. 4:11).

Contentment is the counter to envy.

What does this line from I Timothy mean for us? "Godliness with contentment is great gain!"

Contentment is a learned virtue.

"Life, is a pilgrimage from one moment of nakedness to another. So we should travel light and live simply. Our enemy is not possessions, but excess. Our battle cry is not 'Nothing!' but 'Enough!'" John Stott

"All this and Jesus too!" The Puritan

Old Testament warning - Deuteronomy 8:10-14  
"When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you. "Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built

good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."

Contentment knows that if we have Jesus we have enough.

"Godliness with contentment is great gain."  
I Timothy 6:6

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## Sermon: Contentment: The Learned Virtue - Philippians 4

by [Rick Ezell](#) on Wednesday, January 01, 2014 at  
7:00 AM

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### Sermon series: Godly Virtues

1. [Honesty: The Complete Virtue – 2 Kings 12](#)
2. [Godliness: The Serious Virtue – 1 Corinthians 10](#)
3. [Contentment: The Learned Virtue – Philippians 4](#)

4. [Usefulness: The Impact Virtue – Luke 5](#)
5. [Endurance: The Resilient Virtue – Romans 5](#)

## [Scriptures: Philippians 4:11](#)

### Introduction

Historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., observes that our society is marked by "inextinguishable discontent." Our quest is better and what is next. We want a better job with better pay and a better boss. We want better relationships and a better car and a better backhand in tennis or a longer drive in golf. And, we have a propensity to live endlessly for the next thing – the next weekend, the next vacation, the next purchase, and the next experience. We are never satisfied, never content, and envious of those who have what we have not attained or accumulated.

### I. What is contentment?

Paul, the apostle, wrote, "I don't say this out of need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am" (Phil. 4:11). How could he make such a bold statement? Because he knew that contentment lies not in what he has, but in whose he is.

When I come into a relationship with God through his Son, Jesus Christ, I understand whose I am and what I have. A lack of contentment causes me to look horizontally – at what others have so I am never satisfied. Contentment invites me to look vertically – at God. When I look in his direction, regardless of my possessions or lack of or status or lack of, I know that he is enough.

A man once went to a minister for counseling. He was in the midst of a financial collapse. "I've lost everything," he bemoaned.

"Oh, I'm so sorry to hear that you've lost your faith."

"No," the man corrected him, "I haven't lost my faith."

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"That's not what I said," the man objected. "I haven't lost my salvation."

"You have your faith, your character, your salvation. Seems to me," the

minister observed, "that you've lost none of the things that really matter."

We haven't either. You and I could pray like the Puritan. He sat down to a meal of bread and water. He bowed his head and declared, "All this and Jesus too?"

John Stott wrote, "Contentment is the secret of inward peace. It remembers the stark truth that we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it. Life, in fact, is a pilgrimage from one moment of nakedness to another. So we should travel light and live simply. Our enemy is not possessions, but excess. Our battle cry is not 'Nothing!' but 'Enough!' We've got enough. Simplicity says, if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that."

For the Christian: Contentment knows that if we have Jesus we have enough.

## II. How can I be content?

Contentment comes when we can honestly say with the apostle Paul, "I know both how to have a little, and I know how to have a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret [of being content] – whether well-fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me"

(Phil. 4:12–13). Contentment is learned.

Doug McKnight could say those words. At the age of thirty-two he was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Over the next sixteen years it would cost him his career, his mobility, and eventually his life. Because of MS, he couldn't feed himself or walk; he battled depression and fear. But through it all, Doug never lost his sense of gratitude. Evidence of this was seen in his prayer list. Friends in his congregation asked him to compile a list of requests so they could intercede for him. His response included eighteen blessings for which to be grateful and six concerns for which to be prayerful. His blessings outweighed his needs by three times. Doug McKnight had learned to be content.

So had the leper on the island of Tobago. A short-term missionary met her on a mission trip. On the final day, he was leading worship in a leper colony. He asked if anyone had a favorite song. When he did, a woman turned around, and he saw the most disfigured face he'd ever seen. She had no ears and no nose. Her lips were gone. But she raised a fingerless hand and asked, "Could we sing 'Count Your Many Blessings'?"

The missionary started the song but couldn't finish. Someone later commented, "I suppose you'll never be able to sing the song again." He answered, "No, I'll sing it again. Just never the same way."

Such contentment is learned. It isn't natural. We're not born with it. It is not a gift.

**Our tendency is to look for things that will make us content – those things that are better or those events that are next, rather than putting forth the effort it takes to learn how to be content. The first time I took a group of students snow skiing, several of the older teenagers didn't want to "learn." They just wanted to ski down the mountain like the people on the slope they saw as the rode in on the bus. Skiing isn't like that, and neither is becoming content. It takes a willingness and effort to learn anything. We can't just wish things into existence. Contentment is no different. It too must be learned.**

May I ask you a question? What is the one thing separating you from joy? How do you fill in the blank: "I will be happy when \_\_\_\_\_?" When I am healed. When I am promoted. When I am married. When I am single. When I am rich. How would you finish the statement?

Now, with your answer firmly in mind, answer this. If your ship never comes in, if your dream never comes true, if the situation never changes, could you be happy? If not, then you are living in claws of discontentment.

### III. Where does contentment reside?

#### *A. Contentment is of the heart*

Contentment isn't denying one's feelings about wanting and desiring what they can't have, but instead it exhibits a freedom from being controlled by those feelings.

Contentment isn't pretending things are right when they are not, but instead it displays the peace that comes from knowing that God is bigger than any problems and that he works them all out for our good.

Contentment isn't a feeling of well-being contingent on keeping circumstances under control, but instead it promotes a joy in spite of circumstances, looking to God who never varies. Contentment is not based on external circumstances, but rather on an internal source. Contentment is of the heart.

The majority of people in our society is like thermometers and suffers from pseudo happiness – a counterfeit high that quickly evaporates. They hope the

next superficial satisfaction will last, but external happiness is like cotton candy. It's sweet for a moment and dissolves an instant later. A person who is happy because she is vacationing on Maui is a person who has only a few days to be happy. But a person who has learned to cultivate deep-down contentment will be a consistently joyful person wherever they are.

Most people thirst for what the apostle Paul had: enduring contentment, a deep-down, soul-satisfying contentment. That kind of contentment can only come from within. Contentment is always an inside job. It has everything to do with what is going on inside you, not what is going on outside. It has only one source. That source is found in a soul satisfying relationship with our Heavenly Father that cares for us and promises to meet us where we are.

#### *B. Contentment is of the will*

Contentment is a matter of accepting from God's hand what he sends because we know that he is a good God and wants to give good gifts to his children. We accept, therefore, from God's hand that which he gives. All that is needful he will supply. Even pain and suffering that seemingly cannot be corrected, he can redeem.

If we fail to surrender we will forever be discontent. Our freedom will be suffocated. We will be in bondage to our desires. Our relationships will be poisoned with jealousy and competition. Potential blessings will be sacrificed. Discontentment has the potential to destroy our peace, rob us of joy, make us miserable, and tarnish our witness. We dishonor God if we proclaim a Savior who satisfies and then live discontent.

## IV. What is the secret of contentment?

Those things we expect to bring contentment surprisingly do not. We cannot depend upon contentment to fall into our laps from education, money, or status because contentment arises from a divine source that money and material possessions cannot purchase.

The secret of contentment is hidden from the casual observer. What is that secret?

#### *A. Remember the cross*

"For me, living is Christ and dying is gain" (Phil. 1:21). The cornerstone of contentment is the cross. Remember what Jesus has done for us on the cross. Because of the cross we are freed from the chains of sin. Because

of the cross, our salvation is secure. Because of the cross, our friendship with God is possible. Because of the cross, our future in heaven is guaranteed. Isn't that enough? What else really matters? The really big things are taken care of!

### *B. Let go of the past*

"Brothers, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead" (Phil. 3:13). We cannot hope to ever gain contentment while holding on to past failures and mistakes – others or ours. There's a difference between ignoring past wrongs and forgetting them. Forgetting means that we work through the process of forgiving others and allowing God's forgiveness to cover us. We need to let go of such statements that begin with "I should have," "If only," and "If they hadn't." True forgiveness requires that we see the wrongs clearly, articulate them, release them to God, and then walk away from them. This process may take some time and some assistance, but without it we will never have a contented heart.

### *C. Live one day at a time*

"And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in

Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). Here we wait on God. We need to surrender our timetable and future to him.

Discontentment is due to a wrong focus. If we focus on things and others we will be discontent. But, if we focus on God, living each day in the light of his glory, the things of this earth will pale in comparison.

### *D. Find sufficiency in Jesus Christ*

"I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). The term content suggests "self-sufficiency." But in the context of this text it means being at peace with Christ's sufficiency. When his powerful presence is consuming us, we can do all things. Christ has not given us unlimited strength. But we can experience contentment because we are a continual recipient of supernatural strength. Our human determination may help us to endure adversity and pain. Our emotional toughness will help us get through job loss and financial hardships. But only Christ can generate a contented spirit within us amidst all that is happening around us.

## Conclusion

Tim Vanderveen from Spring Lake, Michigan was a great student at Hope College, Holland, Michigan. Tall, broad

shouldered, curly hair, smile as broad as the dawn, as handsome as they came. In the early 90s after graduating from college, he took a job at Johnson Controls. Scurried up the ladder of success about as quickly as anyone can.

On a rawboned, wind-whipped November afternoon, Tim called his good friend and former professor, Tim Brown. Professor Brown said, "Hey, Tim, how you doing?"

A weak, trembling voice said, "I'm not doing so good."

Professor Brown said, "What's up with you?"

Tim said, "I'm in the hospital in Grand Rapids. I got the flu or something. My folks are out of the country."

Professor Brown said, "I'm going to be in Grand Rapids later today. Maybe I can stop by and see you. Would that be okay?"

Tim said, "I'd like that a lot."

By the time Professor Brown visited Tim, the doctors had already been there. It wasn't the flu. It was leukemia. And that began a three-year, arduous battle that he would lose – or win, maybe.

Now come to Room 5255 in Spectrum Hospital three years later. Professor Brown walked into Tim's room. His mother was sitting in the corner crying. You can't blame her. Tim is lying on his side. They had positioned the pillows between his skinny little legs. His hair wasn't curly anymore. There wasn't enough energy for him to look at the professor, so he got down on one knee so he could look him eyeball to eyeball. He said, "Hi, Tim."

Tim said, "Hi, Professor."

There was a long, awkward pause. Professor Brown had been a pastor for twenty years and still didn't know what to say.

Tim broke the silence, "I've leaned something."

The Professor knew this much at least: You don't trifle with the words of a person who is about to die; you just listen carefully. So the professor said, "Tell me, partner, what have you learned?"

Tim said, "I've learned that life is not like a VCR."

The professor didn't get it anymore than you are not getting it now.

So the professor said, "I don't get it. What do you mean?"

Tim said, "It's not like a VCR; you can't fast forward through the bad parts."

Long pause. The professor is thinking to himself: Where does he get this stuff?

Then Tim interrupts the silence again to say, "But I have learned that Jesus Christ is in every frame, and right now that's just enough."

Contentment has learned the lesson that Jesus is enough. If you know Jesus, you have a God who hears you, the power of love behind you, the Holy Spirit within you, and all of heaven ahead of you. If you have Jesus, you have grace for every sin, direction for every turn, a candle for every corner, and an anchor for every storm. You have everything you need.

Can leukemia infect your salvation?  
Can bankruptcy impoverish your prayers? A tornado may take your earthly house, but will it touch your heavenly home?

## Thanks for Their Gifts Philippians 4:10-13

<sup>10</sup>I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup>I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be

content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup>I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup>I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Godliness with contentment leads to great gain.



[Bobby Earls](#)

Sermon • Submitted 10 years ago

Philippians 4:11

Philippians 3:20–21

Philippians 4:1–19

Contentment

Living the Contented Life

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TOPIC: Living the Contented Life

Pastor Bobby Earls, First Baptist Church,  
Center Point, Alabama

Sunday morning, August 2, 2009

(Sermon outline by the Rev. Francis W.  
Dixon, Lansdowne Baptist Church,  
Bournemouth, England)

ADVERTISEMENT

*11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:*

[Philippians 4:11 \(NKJV\)](#)

NOW – We all live in a world that promotes dissatisfaction with our lives. We are constantly bombarded with newer and better things that promise to make our lives more complete if only we would obtain them! If we listen to the world, we will always be comparing the lifestyles and possessions of others with our own, and we will always be dissatisfied.

THEN – The Apostle Paul had learned how to live a life of contentment. You have to love and respect a man like Paul. He could say *“I have learned in whatever state I am in, to be content.”*

Paul was content in sickness or in health. He was content in affluence or in poverty. Paul was content in strength or in weakness; content when he was abased or content when he was abounding. He was content when he was full or when he was hungry. Paul was content at all times!

When Paul wrote these words he was in Nero’s prison in Rome. Paul had enjoyed power and status among his people. Raised in the lap of luxury. Now he was deprived of many of life’s barest necessities. Yet he could happily say, *“I am content.”*

Paul never knew most of the pleasures and amenities of life we take for granted today. Yet he could give them all up and still be filled with the joy of the Lord. His contentment did not depend on his environment but on his relationship with Christ.

**ALWAYS – The Bible teaches that we can learn to live a life of contentment. Not a contentment that comes from possessions, activities, or other people, for these can be changed or taken**

**away. But a life of contentment that comes from our relationship with Jesus Christ. There is absolutely nothing that can take that away.**

Someone has said that contentment frees you to enjoy every good thing God has given you. Contentment demonstrates your belief that God loves you and has your best interest in mind.

**I came across this definition of contentment, “Contentment is when we become convinced that our resources in Christ Jesus are more than adequate for every situation in life that we face. “**

This morning we are going to spend a few moments looking at the marvelous fourth chapter of Paul’s letter to the Philippians. Philippians 4 is full of wonderful principles that can help each of learn to live the contented life.

I. CONTENTMENT COMES WHEN WE UNDERSTAND THE PURPOSE OF GOD,

*And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.*

[Philippians 4:3 \(NKJV\)](#)

This 3rd verse reminds us that as Christians our names are recorded in

God’s Book of Life. This also reminds us that our salvation is the result of God’s eternal purpose in Christ.

Contentment begins when we as Christians understand and appreciate the purpose of God in our salvation. Jesus taught His disciples that the primary reason for our rejoicing is the confidence that our names are written down eternally in heaven. [Luke 10:20 \(NKJV\)](#), says, *Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”*

II. CONTENTMENT COMES WHEN WE PRACTICE THE PRESENCE OF GOD,

*Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things.*

[Philippians 4:8 \(NKJV\)](#)

[Philippians 4:8](#) gives us six great virtues or character traits found in the lives of believers who are practicing the presence of God in their lives.

A. Truth, *whatever things are true*, absolute honesty.

B. Honor, *whatever things are noble*, that which is worthy

C. Justice, *whatever things are just*, that which is right or righteous

D. Purity, *whatever things are pure*, inward purity, clean and holy

E. Loveliness, *whatever things are lovely*, [1 Corinthians 13:4-7 \(NKJV\)](#)  
*4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

F. Good Report, a character above reproach; a winning, attractive personality.

Living such a life of Christian distinction can only be accomplished by practicing the presence of Holy God in our lives. When we do, we live experience contentment.

III. CONTENTMENT COMES WHEN WE FELLOWSHIP WITH THE PEOPLE OF GOD,

*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.*

[Philippians 4:10 \(NKJV\)](#)

*Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress.*

[Philippians 4:14 \(NKJV\)](#)

Like Paul, we know contentment in our lives when they are lived in harmony with and appreciation for our Christian brothers and sisters. We are family. We are a spiritual family, the family of God. Listen again to how lovingly Paul expresses his care for his spiritual family at Philippi in verse one.

IV. CONTENTMENT COMES WHEN WE EXPERIENCE THE PEACE OF GOD,

*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.*

## Philippians 4:6-7 (NKJV)

It should not be overlooked that Paul also emphasizes the importance of prayer in the life of a believer in these verses. Instead of anxiety or worry, Paul recommends prayer, supplication and thanksgiving. He instructs us to *let our requests be known to God*. Tell God about it.

He says when we replace worry with prayer; we will also know peace, the peace of God. This is a peace that cannot necessarily be explained but experienced! There is a beautiful word picture here in verse 7. It's found in the word *guard*. The word means to set up a guard or sentinel over one's heart, to guard or protect one's heart, and we might even say one's mind, which leads to peace and contentment.

V. CONTENTMENT COMES WHEN WE REALIZE THE POWER OF GOD,

*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*

## Philippians 4:13 (NKJV)

This is really the secret to true contentedness. Knowing and experiencing the power of God or Jesus Christ living within us. It is Christ in us, the hope of Glory who enables us to know true contentedness.

VI. CONTENTMENT COMES WHEN WE RECEIVE THE PROVISION OF GOD,

*And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*

## Philippians 4:19 (NKJV)

What a wonderful promise from God's word. Moody called [Philippians 4:19](#) God's blank check. In God's economy, the bank will never go bankrupt. He promises to supply all our need not our wants. He has plenty of capital, *according to His riches*; the bank's location is found *in glory*, and *Christ Jesus* is our guarantor!

How we today in such a materialistic society need to understand the words of Paul as he also told his young son in the faith, Timothy.

[1 Timothy 6:8 \(NKJV\)](#), *And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.*

Finally,

VII. CONTENTMENT COMES WHEN WE ANTICIPATE THE PAROUSIA OF GOD,

*Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.*

Philippians 4:5 (NKJV)

***20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.***

Philippians 3:20-21 (NKJV)

May I teach you a new word or phrase you may not know? It is the Greek word *parousia*, and refers to the coming of the Lord or the sudden presence of the Lord.

Contentment comes as we begin to live with a holy expectation and anticipation of the soon and certain return of our Lord Jesus Christ. We find ourselves praying the prayer of the Revelator John who prayed, *“Even so come Lord Jesus.”*

So we learn from this tremendous chapter that the secret of Paul’s contentment was the Lord Himself—His Purpose, His Presence, His People, His Peace, His Power, His Provision and His Parousia.

## SECRET OF CONTENTMENT

Text: Philippians 4:10-13

I want you to open your Bibles again tonight to the letter to the Philippians, chapter 4, and I want to read verses 10 through 13:

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. (He is referring to the gift that they sent to Paul by Epaphroditus.) Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. 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. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

Now, Americans especially, are intoxicated by the word secret. Our ears really perk up when somebody says, I have a secret I want to share with you. Of course, you know what a secret is? It is something you tell everybody, one person at a time. The advertising world and the media world capitalize on this. All the tabloids at the grocery store checkout are advertising or proclaiming some secret—the secret diet of the stars or a secret pill that will cure cancer. Of course, I never would buy one of those things, you understand. But I do

read pretty quickly while I'm in the checkout line. And I've heard sermons on the secret of power, the secret of prayer, and the secret of building a great church. It has been overused and abused so I never use the word secret in the titles of my sermons—except tonight, because Paul used it. He said, I have learned the secret, to be content whatever my circumstances.

I want to speak to you tonight on this subject, **The Secret of Contentment**. **Contentment is a very interesting word. It means to be satisfied, to be at peace with your self. I think one of the characteristic marks of our day is the discontent of people. Of course, discontent goes along with covetousness.** The truth of the matter is that everybody here tonight is either covetous or content. When I use the word covetous, and the Bible uses the word, it doesn't simply apply to money. That is how we apply it most of the time. Being covetous means simply that you are not satisfied with what you have, and you are trying your best to get more. Most people I know and come in contact with are discontented with their lot in life, —maybe in their home or in their job. Discontent in a home can cause strife and anger and hostility, and bring about separation and divorce. Discontent in a person's life can create such strife within, and such tension and disharmony within, that it can almost give you ulcers.

Discontent is a curse upon man. Adam lost paradise because he was discontented. God had given him everything. He and Eve had everything there was to have. Well, there was one tree that they couldn't eat of, but they didn't need to. But they weren't content with what God had given them. So because of discontent, Adam and Eve lost paradise and plunged the human race into sin. Angels who sinned fell from their first estate because they were discontented—not satisfied. Lucifer fell because he was discontented.

I have to say, honestly, that about half the pastors in the churches where I go are discontented and looking for something else. You can tell it in the way they talk, and in the way they comport themselves, and in the conversations we share. I'm not joking when I say that I have arrived on the scene and the first thing the pastor has done is given me a resume, asking me to pass it on. Now, that is a discontented man; therefore, he is not doing his best for the Lord, or for the church.

So the great pearl is contentment. I believe every person, whether they call it that or not, long and yearn for contentment. Well, Paul is a man who found it. He said, I have learned to be content whatever my circumstances. I have three simple things I want to share with you tonight.

1) There really is a secret of contentment.

There really is a secret of contentment, and Paul found it. He said, I have learned

to be content whatever my circumstances. That word content is a very picturesque word. It literally means to be self sufficient, or self contained, needing no outside assistance. I want you to notice how he states it. In verse 10, he is saying, I rejoice in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. I am rejoicing in the Lord for the gift that Epaphroditus brought from you. Then he immediately says, not that I speak from want. In other words, he doesn't want any misunderstanding. He is rejoicing that these Philippians have given him a gift, but he wants them to know that the joy comes from his contentment, not from the gift. He doesn't want them to misunderstand when he says he rejoices at their gift and think he was worried and going to the mailbox three times a day to see if the check was in the mail. He said, not that I speak in respect of want. Why? For I have learned whatever my circumstances to be self contained, self sufficient, needing no outside assistance.

In the ancient world, that word was used for cities that were self contained; in other words, they had their own water and food supplies. In the ancient days, when an army went to war against a city, they would surround that city to cut off every supply route. They would wait and starve them out. If that city was a contented city, that had its own food and water supply, they couldn't be starved out. They were independent of outside circumstances.

That is what Paul means. He says, I have learned that I am self contained, that I have within me everything that I need to make life livable, and I am not dependent upon outside circumstances. Whatever the circumstances, whatever the situation, it doesn't affect me one way or the other. I maintain my equilibrium through any kind of circumstance. Now, wouldn't that be a good thing for all of us to be able to say? Are we as quick to praise the Lord in bad times as we are in good times?

One night I was sitting on the front pew waiting to preach. There were two women talking behind me, and I couldn't help but hear what they were saying. Evidently, one of the mother's boys had been in a terrible car wreck, and another boy in that car had been killed. This one woman said to the mother, oh, I'm so glad your boy is all right. She said, yes, God is so good. Well, he is, but I couldn't help wondering what that other mother was saying at the same time. Do you think the mother of that dead boy was saying, God is so good. I couldn't help wondering if that mother's son had been the one killed, if she would have been saying, God is so good. You see, there is something about maintaining your equilibrium no matter what the circumstance—that you are the same in bad times and in good times.

This is what Paul is saying, the outward circumstances have no effect upon me. The world can say to me, Paul, if you don't bow down and worship us and go our way,

we are going to take away all your possessions. Paul said, oh, no, you can't do that because I am self contained. I have within me everything I need to make my life worth living. So, he can say no to the world, and no to those temptations. Why? Because everything I need is within me. I am self contained. What a tremendous thing to be that way, to not be dependent upon favorable circumstances, and to be independent of unfavorable circumstances—maintaining that equilibrium. Paul had learned that secret.

Now, I say this carefully, and I've thought a lot about it. If your joy depends upon how your kids are doing, you've not learned to be content. It is hard for you to have joy when your teenage son has run off, or when there is rebellion. You let that circumstance rule your life, dominate your every thought. You can't be happy, and you can't experience joy unless everything is perfect in your life. If your joy depends upon the conditions of your job, then you have not learned to be content. As a pastor, if my joy depends upon what my church is doing, I have not yet learned to be content. Contentment is discovering the sufficiency within yourself so that you have all that you need within yourself.

2) Not only is there a secret of contentment, but it is a secret that must be learned.

I was afraid you were going to say that. Notice, Paul didn't say, I have heard the secret, or somebody told me the secret. He

said, I have learned the secret. Now, he uses **two words here, one in verse 11, and one in verse 12, and they are different words. In verse 11, he says, I have learned to be content, and the word learn there is the ordinary word for learn. But when he comes to verse 12, he says, I have learned the secret, and he uses a different word, an unusual word that was used by the** mystery religions of that day. It meant to be initiated into some great mystery. It reminds me of the Masons. They have secrets. If you are a Mason, you cannot divulge the secrets of Masonry to anybody else. But when you join the Masons, there are certain degrees. As you learn and move up the ladder, you are initiated into certain secrets. That's the word Paul is using. It always implied a long, difficult process. You don't get contentment by saying, Lord, give me contentment, and then God zaps you with it. I wish it were that way, but that's not it. It is a secret that must be learned, and it is a slow and difficult process. You don't learn it overnight, and you can't cram for the final exam.

Now, what school did Paul attend? Let's look at the curriculum of this school. Notice in verse 12, he says, 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. **Notice the opposites, the extremes.**

**Paul** says there had been times when he had been abased, had nothing; and there had been times when he had everything, when he had lived in abundance. There had been times when he had been hungry, and times when he had been so stuffed he thought he would never eat another bite of food. He said he had gone to the extremes.

**He learned that having nothing didn't diminish him, and having everything did not enhance him. You could take away everything from Paul, but you didn't take away from him. You could give everything to Paul, but you didn't add a single thing to him. Do you understand what I'm saying? I don't think that you and I can learn to be** content until we have gone through the extremes of life. All of us have had those good times. And all of us have had those "hit bottom" times, the dry times, the hard times. We've gone to the extremes in our lives. We've known joy, and we've know heartache. We've laughed, and we have cried. It is in the extremities of life, you see, that God is teaching us.

You and I need to understand that for the believer nothing is incidental and nothing is accidental. God has a purpose for everything that he is doing in your life. Right now you may be going through a hard time. God is trying to teach you something. You may be going through a prosperous time, a boom period in your life. God is trying to teach you something. In other words, he is trying to say to us that

if we are self contained, if we are content, that having everything doesn't add anything to us, and losing everything doesn't take anything away from us.

Now, of course, this is exactly opposite of how the world believes. The world believes the more you have, the more you are. They believe that having is being, that what you have constitutes who you are. It is hard to get away from this. You judge a person by the car that he drives, the house he lives in, which side of the tracks he lives on.

When I was a teenager, I worked in a men's clothing store. I was told by those who had been there for 40 years, that the last thing a man takes care of in his dress is his shoes. He may go out and buy an expensive suit, a silk shirt, a silk tie, and wear old scuffed brown shoes. So I fell into the habit of looking at the shoes of everybody I met. Half the time I didn't get their name because I was busy looking at their shoes. I found myself judging a man by his shoes. If he was wearing brown shoes with a black suit, or a blue suit, and they were scuffed up or anything—and especially if he was wearing white socks—I knew that man really didn't know how to dress.

You know, we judge people by simple things, don't we? We judge them by what they have and what they do not have. When you go to apply for a job, you don't go in blue jean cut-offs and a tank top, do you? When you go to apply for a job, you try to look as prosperous as you can

because they are going to judge you by how well dressed you are. The problem is that the church has fallen into that, and we think the same thing. I go to churches, and the pastor will brag about how many millionaires he has in his church. He will say we've got five millionaires in our church. I was in one church where the pastor said, we have twelve doctors in our church. I don't know how many bricklayers he had. He didn't seem to mention it. I don't know how many bag ladies he had in his church. That would not enhance his church in any way. So we have adopted the way of the world. It is a secret that must be learned, and you learn it through the extremities of life. You see the world's way to contentment is increasing your possessions; God's way of contentment is decreasing your desires.

3) The secret of contentment is Christ.

I love Paul because he always comes back to Jesus, doesn't he? He was a Christ-focused man. Notice in verse 13 that he says, I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. I think at times we have perhaps misunderstood that and taken it out of context. We've used that sometimes to mean I can do anything. I can do any job. I can move mountains. I can cause miracles to come to pass. I can do all things through Christ strengthens me.

If you take it out of its context, then you are going to be sorely disappointed. What Paul is talking about is the extremities of life. He says, I can do all things through Christ who

strengthens me. The word do is a very interesting word. It means to be in full health, or to be vigorous. I like the Phillips translation best of all here: I am ready for anything through Christ who pours his strength in me. Paul says, bring it on. I'm ready for anything that the world throws at me. I am ready for anything that the devil throws at me. Why? Christ is constantly infusing me with his power, his strength. So through Christ I am ready for anything. Christ is the secret. You say, oh, I'm disappointed. I was hoping there would be some formula you were going to give us, some twelve step program you were going to give us. But, you see, it's not a formula. **We have to keep coming back to this again and again in the Christian life. It's not a formula; it is a person. That person is Jesus Christ.** Paul says, the Christ who dwells within me is continuously and constantly (and that is the idea of the word) pouring strength into me like a dynamo—so I am ready for anything.

I thank you for your gift, but the truth of the matter is that I would have been all right without it. I appreciate it, but you see I have learned to be self contained, requiring no outside assistance. The secret of this is that Christ who lives in me, by His strength, makes me ready for anything.

Dr. George Duncan, a great British preacher who is now in heaven, told me a story. When he finished, I asked him if it was the truth or just a preacher story. He said it was the truth. He knew this man

personally. He told of an old man who had one son. That son was a pilot and was killed in World War II. Eventually, this wealthy old man died. He had no heirs so his estate was to be auctioned off. A part of this wealthy man's estate was a fabulous art collection. One of the auction houses in London undertook the task of auctioning off these paintings, many of them by masters. On the day of the auction, people had gathered there from all over the United Kingdom because they wanted a chance to buy into this great art collection. The auctioneer came up and put a portrait on an easel that was there. It was a portrait of somebody they didn't know, painted by someone they didn't know. Actually, it was a portrait of the old man's son. The buyers thought it was valueless because nobody knows the artist who painted it, so it is of no worth. So no one would bid on it. But there happened to be in the audience one of the old man's lifetime servants, and he had known that son from the time he was born until the time he died. He thought to himself that it would be nice to have the portrait. Nobody else is bidding so I can probably get it cheap. So he bid. Now, the auctioneer had said that the will stated that before any of the other pieces of art could be sold, this one had to be sold first. So it stood as a barrier because you couldn't auction off the other great masterpieces until this simple portrait was sold. The old servant bid and got it. Everybody was relieved as they could now get on to the good stuff. Then the auctioneer got up and

said that the auction was over. Everyone was stunned. The auctioneer said, the will further stipulates that whoever gets the picture of the son gets the whole lot. I asked Dr. Duncan, is that true? He said I know the man. **And then he said, remember, son, whoever gets Jesus gets the whole lot. The secret of living a contented life is Christ as he is constantly infusing us with his strength.**

**Philippians 4:11-13** Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. 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. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

**1 Timothy 6:6-12** But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

**2 Cor. 12:9-10** “And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness” ...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.”

**Romans 8:28** And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

**Job 36:11** If they obey and serve him, they will spend the rest of their days in prosperity and their years in contentment.

**Proverbs 19:23** The fear of the LORD leads to life; then one rests content, untouched by trouble.

**Psalms 34:10b** Those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

**Romans 12:2** Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

**Proverbs 30: 7-9** Two things I ask of you, O Lord; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.

**Luke 3:14** And some soldiers were questioning him, saying, “And what about us, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not take money from anyone by

force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages.”

**Proverbs 14:30** A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.