

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

The Secret of Being Content

Philippians 4:10-23

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Introduction

We live in an utterly discontent culture. We are discontent with what we have, we are discontent with what we look like. We are discontent with who we are married to. We are discontent with our lot in life.

To make matters worse, we are constantly being groomed to be unsatisfied with our circumstances and with what we have. This is one of the top priorities of marketing companies -- to create and stimulate discontent to increase sales and market share.

The truth is, most people don't experience contentment except for fleeting moments because they most often identify contentment with the absence of problems.

Website blog quotes on fleeting moments of contentment:

- Lying on grass on a warm moonless night in Cape Clear about 1977, the Milky Way like a bright streak across the sky.
- Cutting the engine of our boat and watching the spectacular sunset in total quiet.
- Eating first meal after being told I didn't have bowel cancer.
- Watching my husband sleep in the recliner -- feeling him near me.
- Sitting on our wharf in the evening fishing with my husband, listening to the thrushes sing across the mirror-calm lake.
- Cuddling one of my children to sleep.

It is amazing that when the apostle was a prisoner of Rome, chained to a guard day and night, restricted from planting more churches, he nevertheless writes a letter that is the most joyful, the most triumphant of all his letters. Eleven times in this letter the apostle uses the word "Rejoice", which defines the overall theme of this letter.

We have discovered that despite Paul's difficult circumstances ...:

1. He was man who rejoiced always - Phil 4:4
2. He was a man who is not anxious about anything - Phil 4:6-7
3. He was a man who knew the peace of God and the God of peace - Phil 4:7, 9
4. He was a man who had learned the secret of contentment - Phil 4:12

Today, we are going to learn from Paul the secret of his contentment!

I The Blessing of Contentment

A. Paul **rejoiced** in the Philippians' concern for him [Verse 10]

1. Their concern was renewed

Renewed = Aneqalete = A horticultural term that means to bloom again.

In this context, then, Paul is saying that the Philippians' revived interest in his welfare was like the blossoming of flowers in the spring.

Ten years have passed since the last Philippian gift was sent to him. Ten years since the last expression of their love.
But now, Paul had received this precious gift from the Philippian church - Phil 2:25.

2. They had no opportunity to show it

We don't know why they had not opportunity to express their support:

- a. It may have been the result of their poverty
- b. It may have been the result of ignorance of Paul's needs
- c. It may have been the result of not being able to locate Paul

Whatever the reason, the Philippians had not sent Paul any support for over 10 years.

Note: Paul accepts things as they are as a part of God's sovereign plan!

He didn't blame the Jews. He didn't blame the Pharisees. He didn't blame Rome. He didn't blame the churches. He didn't blame the Philippians.

Instead, he simply accepted his circumstances as a part of God's larger plan!

Application: You can't know contentment until you know God's sovereignty!

B. Paul assured them he was not in need: [Verse 11-12]

1. He had learned to be **content** whatever the circumstances:

Definition:

Contentment: "Satisfied with things as they are."

Discontent: "A restless longing for better circumstances"

Note: Contentment is not something that comes naturally. It must be learned!

Apart from Christ, we are prone to discontent.

1. We compare ourselves with others
 2. We want what we don't have
 3. We complain about what we do have: spouse, kids, job, friends, house, car
- No one has to teach us to be discontent – it comes naturally to us.

To be content, on the other hand, is a lifestyle that must be learned!!

The Stoic philosophers of Paul's day understood contentment as a pessimistic resignation and acceptance of one's circumstances.

Stoic quote: "Life is hard and then you die!"

But for Paul, contentment was grounded upon His conviction that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Rom 8:28)

- a. He knew what it was to be in **need**

Need = Tapeinoo = “To depress, abase, humiliate”

1 Cor 4:11-13 “To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.

Illustration: The Great Depression vs. our current financial crisis

Financial Fire Drill: What’s the worst thing that can happen?

Can you be content and at peace during times of need?

b. He knew what it was to have **plenty**

Have plenty = Perisseuo = “To superabound”

Prov 30:8-9 “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.”

Truth: It takes just as much grace to please God in abundance as it does in poverty. In both situations we need the Lord!

2. He had learned the **secret** of being content

a. In any and every circumstance

1. Whether well fed or **hungry**

Well fed = Chortazo = “To gorge or be supplied in abundance”

It was used of feeding and fattening animals.

Hungry = Peinao = “To be famished”

1 Cor 4:11 “To this very hour we go hungry [Peinao] and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless.”

2. Whether living in **plenty** or want

Want = Husterio = “To be destitute or suffer great need”

Heb 13:5 “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

1 Tim 6:6-8 “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.”

Quotes: “Contentment is not having all that you want. True contentment is wanting only what you have.”

“Learn to be pleased with everything; with wealth, so far as it makes us beneficial to others; with poverty, for not having much to care for; and with obscurity, for being unenvied.” (Plutarch)

3. He had come to a settled conviction: [Verse 13]
 a. "I can do **all** things through Christ who gives me strength"
Note: "I can do ... not some, not most -- but ALL things!"

It's only through Christ's power that we have strength to live lives of contentment
 John 15:5 "... apart from me you can do nothing."
 Eph 6:10 "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power."

Tips on contentment:

1. Contentment is anchored in knowing that no matter what life brings us, we are getting better than we deserve. "I should be burning in hell!"
2. Contentment requires fully accepting and embracing the present with joy!
3. Contentment comes when we understand that possessions and wealth are tools to advance the purposes and glory of God!
4. Contentment is never found in power, possessions, promotions or pleasure.
There is only one road to contentment and it goes through Jesus.
5. Contentment demands an eternal perspective - Col 3:1-4

Keys to overcoming a discontented heart:

1. Never allow yourself to complain about anything - not even the weather.
2. Never picture yourself in any other circumstances or someplace else
3. Never compare your lot in life with another's
4. Never allow yourself to wish this or that had been otherwise.
5. Never dwell despairingly on yesterday or tomorrow!
6. Never forget that God is sovereign and seated on His throne!
7. Never fail to give thanks in all things - 1 Thess 5:16-18

II The Blessing of Giving

- A. Paul commended them for sharing in his **troubles** [Verse 14]
Troubles = "Thlipsis = "Tribulation or affliction" (occurs 45 times in the NT)
 Heb 13:3 "Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering."
- B. Paul commended them for sharing in his **ministry**: [Verse 15-16]
1. They demonstrated this:
 - a. In the early days of their acquaintance with the gospel
 - b. When Paul set out from Macedonia - Acts 16:6-10
 2. They were the only church that shared with Paul:
 - a. In the matter of **giving**
 2 Cor 8:1-7 "And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I

testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. But just as you excel in everything -- in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us -- see that you also excel in this grace of giving.”

b. In the matter of **receiving**

Prov 11:25 “A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.”

3. They helped him again and again when he was in need

Need = Chreia = “To be destitute”

a. They assisted him on his 2nd missionary journey - Acts 16

b. They assisted him while he was in Thessalonica

c. They sent a gift by the hands of Epaphroditus while he was in Rome

Application: Is there a genuine need that you can fill right now?

C. Paul’s motivation in mentioning their generosity: [Verse 17]

1. He wasn’t looking for a **gift**

Looking = Epizeteo = “To seek, demand or crave”

Paul makes it clear that he is not soliciting another gift (see verses 11, 17). He is not flattering the Philippians, with the hope that this will encourage them to give again.

Matt 6:31-34 “So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after [Epizeteo] all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

2. He was longing for what may **credited** to their account

Longing for = Epizeteo = “To seek, demand or crave”

The picture painted by the accounting metaphor is of compound interest that accumulates all the time until the last day. The apostle has employed this commercial language to show that he has set his heart on an ongoing, permanent gain for the Philippians in the spiritual realm. The advantage (karpos) that accrues to them as a result of their generous giving is God’s blessing in their lives by which they continually grow in the graces of Christ until the parousia.

The Bible does promise a reliable dividend to those who are generous:

1. God will allow you to reap generously - 2 Cor 9:6
2. God will help you abound in every good work - 2 Cor 9:8
3. God will supply you so that you can be generous on every occasion - 2 Cor 9:11
4. God will cause your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine - Prov 3:9-10
5. God will guard the treasure you have stored up in heaven - 1 Tim 6:17-19

Personal application: My growth as a pastor regarding finances and giving at church

1. I'm not asking for your help when I inform you of financial needs at church
2. I'm giving you an opportunity to invest in God's kingdom and to reap a reward

D. Paul informed them that he was content [Verse 18]

1. He had received full payment and even more
2. He was **amply** supplied
3. He had received their gifts through Epaphroditus

a. They were a **fragrant** offering

Fragrant = Osme = "Pleasant aroma"

Paul described the gift of the Philippians using an OT term that looks back to ...:

1. The sacrifice of Noah- Genesis 8:21
2. The consecration of Aaron and his sons - Exodus 29:18, 25
3. The daily sacrifice at the tabernacle - Exodus 29:41
4. The sacrifice of Christ at Calvary - Eph 5:1-2

Application: We are a fragrant offering to God

2 Cor 2:14-16 "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life."

b. They were an acceptable sacrifice

1 Peter 2:4-5 "As you come to him, the living Stone — rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him -- you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

c. They were **pleasing** to God

Application:

Rom 12:1-2 "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing [Euarestos] to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will

be able to test and approve what God's will is -- his good, pleasing [Euarestos] and perfect will.”

Note: Paul was continually thankful, appreciative and encouraging to others!

E. Paul assured them that God would meet all their **needs**: [Verse 19]

When Paul says that God would meet all their needs, he is referring to:

1. Their need for finances - Phil 4:16
2. Their need for growth in discernment for living a holy life - Phil 1:9-11
3. Their need for unity in the church - Phil 2:2-4

Note the promise: Not all your wants -- but all your needs!

Note the context: Sacrificial giving will be rewarded with supernatural provision!

Luke 6:38 “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

1. According to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus

Glorious riches = Ploutos = “Superabundant resources”

Since there is no lack in God’s glorious riches, we can be confident that there will be no lack in God’s supply.

Illustration: The widow and Elisha - 2 Kings 4:1-7

F. Paul exalted in the source of all provision [Verse 20]

1. “To our God and Father be glory forever and ever!

God’s glory is the source and goal of His provision for the saints - Rom 11:33-36

III The Blessing of Friends

A. Paul desired to **greet** all the saints in Philippi [Verse 21a]

Greet = Aspazomai = “To embrace or warmly welcome”

Saints = Hagios = “Holy, consecrated, set apart ones”

Paul most often addresses his letters to “the saints” (Rom 1:7; Eph 1:1, Phil 1:1)

When we think of a "saint" we generally think of a person who is:

1. Extraordinarily pious in their commitment to God (Mother Theresa)
2. Recognized and canonized by the church for an outstanding miracle
3. And last but not least, they’re DEAD!

But according to the Bible there are only two types of people in the world -- saints and pagans. Or if you’re from the South -- “saints and aints”!

1. Mankind can be divided into two groups:

a. Those outside of Christ - the “aints” (Col.4:5; 1 Thess. 4:12)

- b. Those who are "IN CHRIST" - the "saints" (2 Cor 5:17; Rom 8:1)
2. By man's first birth he is "IN ADAM" - an "ain't" (1 Cor. 15:22) and he is part of the old creation that was spoiled by the fall. By man's second birth (John 3) he is "IN CHRIST" - a "saint" (1 Cor. 15:22) and part of the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

Application: Saint or ain't -- it's one or the other!!

B. Paul expressed greetings from: [Verse 21b-22]

1. The **brothers** who were with him
Brothers = Adelphoi = This is the 9th and final use of this word in Philippians.
2. The saints in Rome
 The elders, deacons, believers and recent converts.
3. The **believers** of Caesar's household
 A testimony to faithfulness of Paul and the power of the Gospel!
 Rom 1:16 "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile."

C. Paul gave them a closing benediction [Verse 23]

1. The **grace** of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirits
 The book of Philippians, like the Christian life, begins & ends with the grace of God!
 2 Cor 13:14 "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

Conclusion

1. Unbelievers: Are you a saint? If not, you are an "ain't"
 - a. **Admit** and repent of your sin
 Acts 3:19 "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord ..."
 - b. **Believe** in Jesus Christ
 John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."
 - c. **Confess** Jesus as your Lord
 Rom 10:9 "That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."
2. Believers: Are you content? If not, you need to repent!
 - a. Run a financial fire drill in your mind. What is the worst thing that could happen?
 - b. Ask God to forgive you for stressing out over what He said he would take care of.
 - c. Make a decision today to enjoy and embrace every moment of your life knowing that

God is sovereign and has absolutely everything under control!
d. Reflect on the things of your eternal home! We're almost there!!

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