

Learn to be Content

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[0 : 00] What makes you happy? Do you know what it means to be content? Here's a conundrum. If you're chasing happiness, you'll never be content.

And if you learn to be content, you'll find happiness. Now that'll tweet, or post, or preach. Let me say it again. If you're chasing happiness, you'll never be content.

But if you learn to be content, you'll find happiness. The Apostle Paul learned to be content.

We are still in the book of Philippians, and chapter number 4, we're nearing the end of our series in the book of Philippians. And it didn't come naturally for the Apostle Paul, just like it doesn't come naturally for you or for me, to be content in whatever situation we find ourselves in.

But Paul's contentment was found in Christ. Paul's contentment was not in himself, was not in his lineage, was not in his circumstances, was not in his religion, was not in his finances.

[1 : 22] Paul found his contentment in Jesus Christ, and that is what flowed through every area of his life. And it wasn't conditional on any circumstance.

And it wasn't a self-help mantra that the Apostle Paul woke up every morning to, and looked into, in our case, the mirror, and said to yourself, you're going to be happy today, you're going to be content, you are going to be successful.

There are a lot of people that do that, to talk themselves into a particular kind of feeling. But it wasn't a self-help process that Paul went through, that he was practicing.

He had come to know, and he had come to rely on Jesus Christ. And he had come to understand that God was going to come through in every situation, and God was going to take care of him, and that Jesus was all he needed.

He didn't need money, although money helped. He didn't need anything other than what God chose to provide for him.

[2 : 30] See, that's why he was able to say in Philippians chapter 4 and verse number 13, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Now that verse is highly misused all the time. People use Philippians 4.13 like when they say to someone, you can grow up and be president one day.

You can grow up and be anything you want to be, because I can do all things, or you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. That's not what Paul meant. That is not the context of what Paul is saying here in Philippians 4.13.

Paul is talking about being in a rotten circumstance and being able to make it through it. Paul is talking about having plenty and learning how to enjoy it, appreciate it, and not rely on it.

And then tomorrow, you're stuck in another bad circumstance. But you know what? He says, I can do those things through Christ who strengthens me. So let's take a look at our text this morning.

[3 : 38] We're going to be, as I said, in Philippians chapter 4, verses 10 through 13. We're going to be spending our time in verses 10, 11, and 12. If things work out, we're going to be in verse 13 next week.

Father's Day is coming up soon for you guys. Moms, you had your chance last month. Guys, we have our opportunity this month. But because of what all our moms and our spouses do for us, it really ought to be Mother's Day every day, right?

All the ladies will say amen. In verse number 10, we're seeing here, but I rejoice, Paul says, in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care for me has flourished again.

Though you surely did care, he says you lacked opportunity. And in verse number 10, what we see is the Apostle Paul trusting the overruling, the overarching providence of God.

Paul says, I find myself in a difficult circumstance. And he says, at the last, he says, at last your care for me has flourished again.

[4 : 51] He said, you lacked opportunity before, but your gift for me that was brought by Epaphroditus, he says, it's come just in time.

God knew. And in the overruling providence of God, God knew months before, weeks before, when you took those offerings together.

I may not have needed it at that time, but God knew I was going to need it. And by the time the offering arrived with the messenger, Paul said, timing was just right.

God took care of me. I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again. This is the working of God.

When we talk about the providence of God, that is the working of God in advance to arrange circumstances and arrange situations for the fulfilling of his purpose.

[5 : 48] Have you ever received maybe a dividend? We have not often, but a dividend in the past, maybe from an insurance company, a policy that you had, and they gave you a dividend, and you just had maybe a little medical emergency, and you needed some funds to pay for it, and you didn't have the money in your account, and the check came right before the payment was due?

Well, guess what? That insurance company had decided way back when that they were going to do this. And they cut the check, and it went through the red tape of the process, probably weeks, and then it got put in the mail.

Well, and no offense to our mail carrier, but sometimes the U.S. mail takes a little bit longer depending upon your mail carrier. Matter of fact, we have a good mail carrier here in the room this morning, but sometimes our mail carrier gets confused and puts, like this week, puts somebody else's stuff in our box.

But when it came, it came when? In the nick of time. So that was the overruling providence of God. God knew that Paul was going to need this gift.

He put it on the hearts of the Philippian believers, and by the time it got there, Paul said, just in time, and God's timing was right. God and his providence had caused the church in Philippi to become concerned about Paul's well-being, Paul's welfare, so they took up an offering, and they sent it to Paul.

[7 : 19] And it came at the very time Paul needed their love offering the most. So they had been concerned, Paul says, but they lacked the opportunity. Many Christians today have the opportunities, but they lack the concern.

And so we need to have both. We need to have the concern, and when the opportunity arises, be willing to take it. Verse 11, Paul goes on to say, Not that I speak in regard to need.

Now, wait a minute. Paul, you're writing to a church that just gave you money, and you're telling them you don't need it? Now, that's not a very smart thing to do, but that's not what Paul was meaning here.

He says, Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am to be what? To be content.

In whatever state, whatever situation I find myself in, he says, I've learned to be content. So Paul is quick to let his friends know that he's not complaining.

[8 : 23] He's not bellyaching, and he's not poor-mouthing, and says, Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you so much. I don't know how I was going to do it, and I needed this money so badly.

I was in dire straits, and I was in desperate need. No, what Paul is doing is, I'm not really complaining, because I've learned to be okay, even though I don't have enough of what I feel that I need.

But thank you anyway, because God knew I needed it, and he used you as a vehicle to meet that need. He says, So I've learned, in whatever state I am, I've learned to be content.

His happiness was not depending upon circumstances or things. His joy came from something far deeper, something apart from either poverty or prosperity.

And when Paul uses the word content, it actually means contained. He said, Well, that's kind of different. Contained, content.

[9 : 27] The Greek word means self-contained or self-sufficient. Now, the Greek Stoic philosophers loved to use that word.

And in the way that they used it, much of the way that people use it today, those who are man-centric, they say that you have everything you need inside of you, just like Rogerian counseling.

They say, You know what? You've got all the answers inside of you, and you just need to help someone ask you the questions to help you get it out. But you've got all you need. That is not at all what Paul is saying.

Paul took that word that was popular in Greek Stoic philosophy to say, We're all self-sufficient, to say, I'm sufficient, and I'm self-contained in Christ.

It's Christ that fills the gap. It's Christ. So what he's saying is, I'm self-sufficient in Christ. I don't need money.

[10 : 33] I don't need a big house. I don't need a fancy car. I don't need all of this because Christ is all I need. So if I have Christ, I have everything. That's what Paul is saying here.

So he says, I'm content. I'm contained. I don't need anything in order to be content because my sufficiency is in Christ. But the Christian is not, as we said, the follower of Christ is not sufficient in and of themselves.

We're only sufficient in Christ because Christ lives in us. We're adequate for the demands of life. If you have God's Holy Spirit in you, and you get a bad report from the doctor, you've got everything that you need to make it through that.

If you find that the economy has a downturn like we have, and you lose tens of thousands of dollars in your retirement account, guess what?

You have everything you need. It may not seem like it. It may hurt, and I know it does hurt. But we still have everything we need in Christ because he will not allow the righteous to go hungry.

[11 : 41] He will take care of us. If we put the things of God first, he will provide the food, the clothing, the shelter, and the things that we need. Now, the world we live in tells us we need things to make us happy.

Isn't that right? We see it in advertising. Well, if you want to be happy, and if you want to look like this guy, or if you want to look like this woman, then you need to use our product.

Then you'll be happy, and you'll look like this. But the world is wrong when it comes to what we need. The world doesn't understand what we truly need to make us happy.

Because remember, if we're searching for happiness, we'll never be happy. But if we learn to be content, we'll find true happiness.

See, the world says we need more money. We need better health. We need a bigger and nicer and newer house. We need a newer car. We need a different spouse. We need a different church.

[12 : 37] We need whatever. We need a different job. And then we'll be happy. But these things don't make us happy. Well, initially, maybe they do. But then what happens when the new wears off?

It becomes just like all the other old stuff we have. And we're looking for something else to make us happy. And there's a physiological reason why that's true when things are new.

We have chemicals in our brain that gets pumped into our pleasure center of our brain, and it makes us feel good. But it's an external process that's taking place that makes us feel good.

And then when the new wears off, everything goes back to normal, and we're looking for another bright, shiny object. And Paul is realizing he doesn't need that.

I like this poem that I found, and I'd like to read it for you this morning. And I think it's going to resonate. It was spring, but it was summer I wanted.

[13 : 42] The warm days and the great outdoors. It was summer, but it was fall I wanted. The colorful leaves and the cool, dry air. It was fall, but it was winter I wanted.

What? The beautiful snow and the joy of the holidays. It was winter, but it was spring I wanted. The warmth and the blossoming of nature. I was a child, but it was adulthood I wanted.

The freedom and the respect. I was 20, but it was 30 I wanted. To be mature and sophisticated. I was middle-aged, but it was 20 I wanted.

The youth and the free spirit. I was retired, but it was the middle I wanted. The presence of mind without limitations. My life was over, but I never got what I wanted.

That describes a lot of folks, does it not? We always want the next thing, but when we get the next thing, we get to a point, we want the good old days. And then we get to a point, you know what, I never got what I wanted.

[14 : 45] If we only realized that we got everything we needed and we didn't learn how to be content. But with God's help, we can learn to be content in our standing in Christ.

And these few short verses, verses 10, 11, and 12, we'll learn a few things about contentment this morning from the Apostle Paul. And I believe these are great lessons to learn that will help us to be content no matter what's going on in our life.

Verse 12, before we get to that first thing, verse 12 says, 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.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Paul said, I know how to deal with poverty and prosperity.

I know how to deal with abundance and the lack thereof. He says, I've learned to be content in all of those situations. So the first thing I believe we learned from the Apostle Paul is that we can learn to be content in the place you're in.

[16 : 00] If you want to be content, if you want to learn how to be sufficient in Christ, then you've got to learn how to be content in the place you're in. And when I say place, I don't mean in the physical location necessarily, although that's included.

Whatever situation, whatever place, whatever state you find yourself in, we need to learn to be content. Paul says in verse 11, he says, not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am.

Whatever place and situation in life I find myself in, with a job, without a job, with money, without money, with health, without health, with friends, without friends.

He says, I've learned to be content in both of those. Sometimes we go through extremes. Sometimes we're there in the messy middle. But Paul says, I have learned to be content.

He said in verse 12, in whatever situation he was in. In verse 11, he says, I've learned in whatever state, in every circumstance I find myself in.

[17 : 09] Now, what was Paul's circumstance? He wasn't finding this contentment in a five-star hotel. He wasn't finding this contentment on a cruise ship. He was finding it in prison, chained to a Roman guard.

But Paul says, I've learned to be content, even in that situation. So many people think today, if they could just relocate, they'd be happy. They'd be content. If they could just switch churches, they'd be content.

If they could just switch jobs, they'd be content. Some people think, if I could live somewhere else where it's not hot and humid, like in South Louisiana, or prone to hurricanes, I'd be content.

But guess what? No matter where you go, there you are. We take all of our discontentment with us, and then it'll be, well, it's too cold. There's too much snow.

Or it's too hot and it's too dry. You know, we never can get everything that we think we need. It's always we think it's one extreme or another.

[18 : 12] When our contentment's in Christ, we don't have to be in a different place to be happy. One day, an airline pilot was flying with his co-pilot, and they were flying over the Tennessee mountains.

And he told his co-pilot, he says, look down there at that little lake. See that little lake? He said, when I was a kid, I used to sit in a rowboat down there and fish.

And when an airplane would pass over, he said, I want to be in that jet flying that airplane. He says, and now I just want to be on that lake fishing.

So we're always wanting to be over that next rise, over that next hill, and we want what we think is where the grass is greener. But Paul had a long litany of adverse and horrible experiences, didn't he?

Stoned with big rocks, put in prison. He was beaten. He was derided. He had gone through all kinds of difficult things in his life.

[19 : 17] But Paul says, I've learned to be content in the midst of all of these things. Well, do you feel stuck in your life? I think Paul found himself there as well.

Paul learned how to be content. We don't need to be in a different place to be content. We don't need to have a bigger house to be content. We don't need a newer car to be content. Now, those things are nice.

I'm not saying they're not, and I'm not saying that we shouldn't maybe work for things like that. But don't look for those things to make you happy. Because if you look for those to make you happy, if you look for that bright, new, shiny car to make you happy, what will happen the next time a stray cart comes careening through the parking lot and puts this big ding the day you, before you get home even?

Yeah, there goes your shiny car, right? And so it's problem after problem after problem with the thing that we thought was going to bring us happiness. A different place won't satisfy us.

Only Jesus will. We look at Philippians 4, 12. I know how to be abased. I know how to abound everywhere at all things. I've learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

[20 : 36] So the first thing is we need to learn to be content in whatever circumstance, whatever state that we are in. Second thing that I think we see from the Apostle Paul is we need to learn to be content with the possessions we have.

We touched on that. But learn to be content not only in what situation you find yourself in, but learn to be content with what you've got. Learn to be content with the possessions that you have.

Verse 12. He says, I know how to be abased, meaning brought low, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things, he says, I've learned both to be full, to be sated, and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

I think Paul knew how to live in the good times as well as the bad. In verse number 12, Paul uses that word abound, and he described his times of plenty.

Well, abound means more than enough. It could be more than enough money to pay your bills, more than enough food than you need to eat.

[21 : 50] It's probable that Paul grew up in a moderately affluent home. It would seem to be the case because of all of the things that were afforded him as he was growing up.

His education, it was not cheap. His, the things that he learned, the status that he had in life. Those most likely before Christ came from the affluence of his situation.

And even after his conversion, he said, I even continue to experience abundance at times. He was, he was making tents. He was, he was a part-time business owner.

And I'm sure there were times when, when people, when business was good. And Paul had more than enough money than he needed. And I'm sure there were times where the economy dried up and Paul didn't have enough.

So Paul says, I know both, I know both places. When they were starting a church at Philippi, they were entertained. Paul and his associates were entertained by Lydia.

[22 : 56] And she was a wealthy businesswoman. And so they knew what it was like to, to hobnob with the rich and famous. But Paul said also, I knew how to hobnob with the, the poor and the, and the, the criminals in jail too.

So he says, I've been in both extremes, but I still learn how to be content. So for Paul, it didn't really matter whether he was feasting or whether he was fasting.

He learned how to be content. One time there was a, a man named Danny Simpson. And at the age of 24, he robbed the bank at gunpoint in Canada.

And all he got was \$6,000 from the bank when he robbed it. And he was caught just a little while later. And when they found the gun that he had used to rob that bank, it was a 1918 45 caliber Colt automatic.

And it was found to be valued at nearly \$100,000. Now, if Danny Simpson had realized what he had, he probably wouldn't have robbed the bank.

[24 : 07] But many Christians are like Danny. They don't realize what they have in Christ. They don't realize that they have already what they need. They literally have a bank account in, in, in heaven that they literally just need to write a check.

And God says, I'll tell you, I'll cover it. Do you need extra strength? I'll take care of it. Do you need extra power? I'll take care of it. Do you need extra faith? I'll take care of it. Do you need extra patience?

I'll take care of it. Do you need to forgive someone that you don't think you can forgive? Don't worry. I'll take care of it. Are you hungry? Don't worry. I'll take care of you. And so, just like Danny, we find ourselves in a situation where we think we need something else when all, we have it all, all the time.

We've had it right there in our hands. So, with having food and clothing, let's be content. We don't need more money to be content. We have a hard time today differentiating, don't we, between needs and wants.

Virtually everything has become a need. You have 12-year-olds saying, I need a phone. Really? Come on. And so, now schools have, when they get back in session, have difficulty with keeping 10-year-olds off of their cell phone during class.

[25 : 28] I mean, really? I need this. I need that. I need a tablet. I need a this. I need a whatever. You know, so we have difficulty differentiating between needs and wants.

Jesus promised, seek you first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. All these things, what you're going to eat, what you're going to drink, where you're going to sleep, all of these things, he says, are going to be added to you.

If you put me first, and doing what's right, focus on serving him, focus on growing in righteousness, and God will take care of the rest of our basic human needs.

Money can buy you a bed, but it can't buy you sleep. It can buy you books, but not wisdom. It can buy a house, but not a home.

It can buy food, but not an appetite. It can buy amusement, but not friends. It can buy you just about anything, but salvation.

[26 : 38] So let's learn how to be content with the possessions that we have. And then number three, learn to be content with the provisions in your life. Learn to be content with the provisions in your life.

I want to challenge you to do something. There's a song that we've sung for years. We've sung it, I think, a few months ago, but sometimes we need to remember those things.

And it's, count your many blessings. Name them one by one. Name them one by one. So if you take a sheet of paper and you write down the blessings that I have, and just start with, I have a house.

I have a vehicle. I have a family. I have whatever. I guarantee you that the list will be longer than you expect.

And if we realize God provided food, God provided shelter, God provided. It may not be what I thought I needed, but not what I wanted, but it's what I needed.

[27 : 56] All of these things, if we learn to be content with the provision that God has provided, given to us in our lives, we can see that we can learn how to be content.

And like the Apostle Paul, throughout our ministry, throughout our time, back years ago when we were first married and with three children in college and having to make ends meet with bologna sandwiches, and we didn't even have all the condiments to go with it, we were happy.

We were content. We really were. And then we get more, and the more we get, the more we seem to, our life, our budget comes up to meet our lifestyle.

And so on. So we've gone both directions two or three different times. But we learned that when we had plenty, it was good. When we had little, we learned to be content.

It was good. So learn to be content with the provisions in our life. Verse number 10. Paul says, 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.

[29 : 13] Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned to be in whatever state I am. He says therewith to be content.

So Paul was content with the providence of God in his life, the timing of God. Paul was content. Paul was okay with when God chose to provide him what he needed.

So throughout this text, we see the Apostle Paul trusting in the sovereignty of God. Just like that song, Waymaker, that we sang just a few moments ago. God will make a way.

God will provide. And that's what Paul was trusting in for his contentment, in the sovereignty and the providence of God. Paul knew that God was in control of his circumstances.

And at the heart of Christian contentment is a strong belief that God is in control. What does Romans 8, 28 say? All things work together for good.

[30 : 19] To them that love God and who are the called according to his purpose. Those who seek to control their lives will constantly be frustrated. Think about it.

We have so many control freaks around us. Have to be in control. Have to be behind the wheel. Have to have their way.

Have to always know what's going to happen next. Always be in control. You know what I call that person? Frustrated. Because we are not in control of life.

Think about it. We are not in control. We are not in control of our health for the most part. We are not in control of the other drivers on the road.

We are not in control of the economy. We are not in control of what other people choose to do that throw a monkey wrench into the works of our life.

[31 : 16] We are not in control, literally, of anything. We are not even in control of ourselves a lot of the times. So, someone who likes to be in control, we call that person frustrated.

Because we go through life frustrated because we can't control everything. When Paul says, I've learned to be content because I've left the control with God. He's sovereign.

He's in his providence. He chooses when and where I need to be. And I'm okay with that. And that's a difficult thing to learn. Because it's a daily thing. It's something that we need to give back to God every day and say, God, you are in charge.

You are in control. We must yield to the control of God and let him be in control. His plans are far greater than ours. God probably has way more things planned for you than you even have planned for yourself.

Think of Joseph's life. Remember the boy with a coat of many colors? And when he was a boy, he had visions of what God was going to do with him.

[32 : 27] He didn't see everything. But Joseph rose eventually to a high position in Egypt to preserve his people. In Genesis 50, verse 20, Joseph said to his brothers, He said, You meant it for evil.

But God meant it for good, that many people may be kept alive. His brothers didn't see it back then. Even Joseph didn't see it. But God and his providence and his good timing saw fit.

Proverbs 16, 9. The heart of man plans his way. But the Lord establishes his steps. What is that telling us? We have every good intention and every good plan, but it's ultimately up to God to work out our footsteps.

So, let me ask you again. What makes you happy? Do you know what it's like to be content?

Because if you're chasing happiness, you'll never be content. And if you learn to be content, you will find happiness.

[33 : 33] Let's learn to be content in Christ. Let's pray. Father, this morning as we have come here together to worship you, may you use your word in our lives.

And may you accomplish your purpose through your word. And Lord, may we learn. May you teach us to be content. And to trust in your sovereignty and in your provision.

That we may learn to be content in every state with the possessions that we have. And with your sovereign deliverance, your sovereign provision.

Be with us throughout this week. May we honor you and glorify you in all that we do. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.