

JOYFUL CONTENTMENT



In this day and age, it can be hard to be content. Wherever we turn, we are constantly bombarded by ads telling us we need something more, we need something better, we need something newer. Media incessantly communicates to us that we are not as pretty as other people, not as popular, not as wealthy, not as healthy, not as happy and comfortable.

Reading Philippians 4 reminds us that contentment isn't just a challenge today; it's been a challenge throughout human history. Even before we were surrounded by screens, human nature has always been prone to envy and greed. We compare ourselves to others. We are restless, always wanting more. We are always anxious, never satisfied.

How did the apostle Paul address this? What did he have to say about contentment? Let's look at Philippians 4.

Joyful contentment relies on God's strength.

Philippians 4:13 reads, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." I've often heard this verse taken out of context. There are people who claim this promise as assurance that they can climb Mt. Whitney or reach a million dollars in sales, because after all, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength."

But Paul isn't saying that he can reach any audacious goal through Christ. In context it is clear that Paul is talking about contentment. Paul says, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 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. I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:11-13).

Being content in any and every situation is as awesome a display of God's strength as any challenging goal that we could dream up! It takes the Holy Spirit helping us to endure. It requires walking in dependence on God, saying to him, "Lord, I can't do this on my own. But I know you can help me."

It's similar to what Paul says about peace in verse 7 of this same chapter, where after encouraging the Philippian church not to be anxious, but to present their requests to God, he says, "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." The peace that God gives his children is beyond human understanding. So too is the contentment that God gives us as we rely on his strength.

Also, notice that Paul said he has learned to be content "whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want" (v. 12). Did you notice that contentment is a challenge not only when we have nothing, but also when we have plenty? We see this in the culture around us – there are plenty of discontented people who have all the latest toys and gadgets.

Contentment doesn't come through getting what we want. Sometimes getting what we want through our own strength only perpetuates us thinking that we don't need to rely on God. Contentment only comes through trust in God and relying on his strength.

Joyful contentment trusts God to meet our needs.

I love the definition of contentment that Pastor Paul gave in his sermon on this passage. He said, "Contentment is a joyful trust that you have all that you need for whatever you are facing because God is with you strengthening you, sustaining you, and satisfying you." When we are content, we aren't frantic, we aren't anxious, we aren't trying to manipulate a situation to get what we want. We are restful, trusting, because we know we have a God who loves us and is with us. The apostle Paul highlights this in verse 19: "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."

Joyful contentment dwells on the good.

This passage about contentment comes directly after the apostle Paul told the Philippian church, "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things" (Phil. 4:8). If Paul had not followed his own advice in this, if he had spent his time mentally ruminating on things that were ugly, false, cruel, or shameful, then how could he have ever learned to be content?

If we mentally dwell on the negative, contentment will continue to elude us. If we dwell on the positive, it will be amazing how much easier it becomes to experience the contentment that comes from God. We need to be wise in what we receive into our minds. We need to filter incoming content carefully, and notice what we dwell on.

Joyful contentment overflows in gratitude.

Much of this chapter consists of Paul thanking the Philippian church for supporting him financially. He is so grateful to them! He makes it clear that God was taking care of him no matter what, and that he was content no matter what, but he also lets them know how much their gift meant to him.

Contentment makes room for gratitude. When we're envious and discontent, we receive blessings with an attitude of entitlement. Finally! It's about time I got some help here!

When we are content no matter what, then we receive blessings with an open hand. We say, Thank you God, for this good gift. May I not grasp it tightly, but hold it loosely, offering it back to you in gratitude.

God's gift to you in Jesus is grace and mercy beyond anything you could earn or deserve. When you focus on God's presence with you, "strengthening you, sustaining you, and satisfying you," your heart will overflow with gratitude to God.

Written by Becky Friese, photos by Dave Friese

