

## Introduction

Ever heard the adage, "Big things come in small packages"?

There is an interesting little statement tucked in the closing portion of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians I feel we must take time to dig out and highlight because it is a matter of such vast conflict and concern in our world today.

"I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:10-13 ESV).

Today our society is permeated by a spirit of discontentment.

*It was spring, but it was summer I wanted,  
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,  
The beautiful snow, and the joy of the holiday season.  
It was now 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 age, but it was 20 I wanted,  
The youth and the free spirit.  
I was retired, but it was middle age that I wanted,  
The presence of mind without limitations.  
My life was over, but I never got what I wanted.*

—Jason Lehman, *Present Tense*

Contentment is among the most exclusive and illusive of experiences in life. What is it?

“... to be free from care because of satisfaction with what is already one’s own. The Hebrew means simply ‘to be pleased.’ The Greek brings out the full force of the word in 1 Timothy 6:8; Hebrews 13:5.

Contentment (1 Timothy 6:6) is more inward than satisfaction; the former is a habit or permanent state of mind, the latter has to do with some particular occurrence or object."

—Dr. James Orr

"But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content" (1 Timothy 6:8 ESV).

"Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for He has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'" (Hebrews 13:5 ESV).

"But godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Timothy 6:6 ESV).

If there is any single battle/struggle that I know to be true in men, it is discontentment. We are restless souls.

Having identified a characteristic and concern in which we can reflect, I want to remind you we are discussing, *Better Together Through Generosity*. Last week we looked at the larger context of this passage, but today we come back to study one of the primary reasons we struggle with generosity. It is due to the envy,

covetousness and greed that can rule our hearts.

“Covetousness and contentment cannot co-exist in our lives.”

Envy results in unhappiness because of the blessings of others. We can hate people we don’t even know—a lack contentment with who we are, where we are and what we have.

But this is not a modern development:

“The mystery of Christian contentment is the duty, glory and excellence of a Christian.”

—Jeremiah Burroughs (Puritan writer, 17th century, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*)

If there is something that should be evident in the life of growing and maturing Christians, it is contentment. This is an undervalued grace.



## **1. Contentment has more to do with what is happening in you than what is happening around you.**

The Apostle Paul (in writing to express gratitude to the church in Philippi), wanted them to know he was not subtly manipulating them—asking for something more or something else. *“I’m not receiving from you and re-sending Ephaphroditus to get something more. I am sending him to you with this letter to say I am deeply grateful for all you have done.”*

Paul may have felt he was in danger of creating an impression that he was in it for the money... how he can profit, etc. Paul was not trying to ingratiate himself to get more, but he was affirming God’s sufficiency in every experience in life.

Paul wanted to make it clear: *“I’m not here waiting for you to give, but I am grateful to receive this in addition to all God has given.”*

Paul knew what it was to have plenty (bumped up on flight) as well as to live on the edge of absolute poverty (back of the bus).

“But as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything” (2 Corinthians 6:4-10 ESV).

Viktor Frankl who spent years in a Nazi concentration camp developed a psychotherapeutic process, logotherapy—*Man’s Search for Meaning*,

“We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last pieces of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offered sufficient proof

that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: The last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances." — Viktor Frankl

## **2. Contentment is something we develop, not something we discover.**

Notice Paul used the word, "abound," not "rebound." He grew through adversity and difficulty.

Most of us don't like change and yet, life is ever changing. Because things keep requiring us to adapt, we can resent where life takes us and what life does to us.

But Paul describes a learned character. Surely he knew a multitude of ups and downs in life—from Lydia's home to the prison doors.

The spirit of contentment was not in detached apathy or the comfort of stoics—use of word here....

Paul discovered and declared, "Christ is enough!" Calm in adversity and humble in prosperity—you have to learn this by being abased and abound.

When we are brought low, temptation = resentment. When we abound, temptation = arrogant/independent.

It all has to do with our union with Christ—Philippians 3:10—I want to know Christ and then Philippians 4:13—I can do all things through Christ.

### **3. Contentment is developed through gratitude, not gain.**

Resist the temptation to compare yourself to others.

Comparison always leads to discontentment and distraction. Begin to appreciate what others have without resenting it. Rejoice with them.

If I have to have what others have to be happy, I am not going to be happy. I have chosen misery. Someone will always get something newer, better because I cannot and will not always have what others have.

“Happiness is not getting what you want in life; it is found in enjoying what you have in life.”

The problem is that we have allowed possessions to become the measure of personhood—Net Worth= Self Worth. When what I have is gone, then I am not worth much.

#### **4. Contentment focuses on God's providence beyond my present.**

I am not locked into what I feel "entitled to" in life, but I am surrendered to "whatever the Lord wills."

Christian contentment makes us flexible. We are able to adapt, endure and resist. This is why Paul said in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

"Blessed are the flexible for they rarely get bent out of shape."

My greatest ambition is to belong to Christ and to become what He desires me to be. This is much easier said than done. Few can give expression to it like Horatio Spafford. This hymn was written after traumatic events in Spafford's life. The first was the death of his son at the age of two and the Great Chicago

Fire of 1871, which ruined him financially (he had been a successful lawyer and had invested significantly in property in the area of Chicago that was extensively damaged by the great fire). His business interests were further hit by the economic downturn of 1873, at which time he had planned to travel to Europe with his family on the SS Ville du Havre. In a late change of plans, he sent the family ahead while he was delayed on business concerning zoning problems following the Great Chicago Fire. While crossing the Atlantic, the ship sank rapidly after a collision with a sea vessel, the *Loch Earn*, and all four of Spafford's daughters died. His wife Anna survived and sent him the now famous telegram, "Saved alone ...." Shortly afterwards, as Spafford traveled to meet his grieving wife, he was inspired to write these words as his ship passed near where his daughters had died.

*When peace like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to know  
It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

Philippians 4:13 is the athletes promise—  
present tense.

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares  
the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil,  
to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah  
29:11 ESV).

I know the plans I have for you....

Paul concludes this letter with as a marvelous  
witness to the sufficiency of Christ.

*For me, be it Christ,  
Be it Christ hence to live:  
If Jordan above me shall roll,  
No pang shall be mine,  
For in death as in life,  
Thou wilt whisper  
Thy peace to my soul.*

*But Lord, 'tis for Thee,  
For Thy coming we wait,  
The sky, not the grave, is our goal;  
Oh, trump of the angel!  
Oh, voice of the Lord!  
Blessed hope,  
Blessed rest of my soul.*

*And Lord, haste the day  
When my faith shall be sight,  
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;  
The trump shall resound,  
And the Lord shall descend,  
A song in the night, oh my soul!*

—Horatio G. Spafford