



“The Secret to Contentment”

Paul’s letter to the followers of Jesus living in the Greek city of Philippi penned some practical principles for maintaining the joy of the Lord no matter what.

I. PICK THE RIGHT AXIS – A Passion to praise Christ 1

Praise Christ in everything

II. PRESERVE THE RIGHT ATTITUDE – A Passion to please Christ 2

Please Christ through sacrificial service

III. PURSUE THE RIGHT AIM – A Passion to pursue Christ 3

Pursue Knowing Christ above all other things

IV. PRACTICE THE RIGHT ACTIONS – A Passion to practice Christ 4:1-9

Practice living like Christ

Paul cited several behaviors that must become a part of our everyday life.

- A. Stand firm in the Lord 4:1**
- B. Harmonize in the Lord 4:2-3**
- C. Rejoice in the Lord always 4:4**
- D. Cultivate the Gentleness of the Lord 4:5**
- E. Cultivate a life of persistent prayer to the Lord 4:6-7**
- F. Contemplate positive things 4:8**
- G. Practice Godly Living 4:9**

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. Philippians 4:9

The immediate context of this command follows Paul’s list of eight life virtues. I our current verse serves as a summary for the whole letter. Paul referenced all the things he had taught them. I will summarize the specifics of the things Paul taught at the close of this series in Philippians. He could be focusing on what he wrote in this letter or had all of his teaching throughout his ministry with them in mind. If we consider a broad application for us today, we would take to heart anything Paul taught and modeled. It wouldn’t be the first time Paul offered his own life as a model to follow or called followers of Jesus to be examples to other believers.

Paul used a Greek term “mimetes” that sounds like our English word “mimic”.

He used this term in the previous chapter.

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. Philippians 3:17

I urge you, then, be imitators of me. 1 Corinthians 4:16

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. 1 Corinthians 11:1

For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9

Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. 1 Timothy 4:12

Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 2 Timothy 1:13

Jesus, of course, is the ultimate infallible model of faith and practice but there is a place for other examples.

Be imitators of God, as beloved children. Ephesians 5:1

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Hebrews 13:7

And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Hebrews 6:11-12

Perhaps a greater awareness of the responsibility to model genuine Christianity would stir a greater desire to live differently. Unfortunately, the behavior of some Christians does more to inhibit investigation of Christianity than inspire it. Many never allow anyone deep enough into their inner world to observe their walk. The one place we cannot avoid modeling is with our children.

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. Philippians 4:9

“practice”

Paul called them to “practice” everything he taught through words and example. Paul used a verb which meant “to perform repeatedly or habitually.” He urged them to adopt a lifestyle based on previous teaching and example. He employed four verbs indicating some specific moment in time.

“have learned” = acquired knowledge or understanding of a subject. Jesus said, “Learn of Me.”

“have received” = took to heart, brought near, assimilated, personally connected, aggressively received, embraced fully. John used this term to describe how Jesus came to His own people but they did not “personally embrace” Him. It is the word used to describe Jesus “receiving” Peter, James and John into His inner circle at the Mount of Transfiguration. It also referred to a tradition received and passed on to others.

The Lord’s Supper 1 Cor 11 Paul received teaching regarding the Lord’s supper.

The Gospel 1 Cor 15; Gal 1:9;

Instructions 1 Thess 4:1-2; 2 Thess 2:15

It is possible to learn something yet not fully embrace it or take it to heart.

“have heard” = word for simply hearing something with the ear (acoustics)

“have seen” = The idea of this verb goes beyond the physical act of seeing and implies a mental perception (Oh, I see!) to understand or see with the mind.

Paul included an interesting balance of Apostolic teaching and personal testimony through this letter. He expected these followers of Jesus to learn, receive, hear and see what he taught. He expected them to internalize the truths and incorporate them into daily practice. The maturity of the Christian life is not measured by what a person knows but what he/she does.

The result of practicing God's instruction is a renewed sense of God's presence.
and the God of peace will be with you. Philippians 4:9

Verse 7 pointed to the provision of peace, sense of health and well-being. This verse promises awareness of the Provider of such peace.

V. POSSESS THE RIGHT ABILITY 4:10-20

Pray for the power and provision of Christ

In this next section, Paul shares something he himself learned that he hopes we will also learn from him. He swung back to sharing out of his own personal experience with Christ. Paul shared the secret of contented living. The problem of living for personal satisfaction in life is that such a pursuit can never be ultimately attained. Something always blocks our self-focused goals.

"Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance. Isaiah 55:2

Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, nor are the eyes of man ever satisfied. Proverbs 27:20

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its desires; but the one who does the will of God lives forever. 1 John 2:15-17

Everyone seeks for more. Few are content with what they have.

Rockefeller was at one point the world's richest man and first ever American billionaire. Considering he was a billionaire in the early 1900's he is still considered as the richest person in modern history. When a reporter asked him, "How much money is enough?" He responded, "Just a little bit more."

Our trip to Africa opened my eyes to the importance of relationships. Those Christians had very little in terms of material things. Yet they lived with a contentment that allowed them to focus on one another.

The focus on getting "just a little bit more" rather than enjoying what you currently have is probably the definition of discontentment. Discontent applies to every area of life.

If I only had a different job.

If I only lost another 10 pounds.

If I only had a better house, car, boat.

If I just had some peace and quiet.

Whenever we indulge the "If onlys" we expose a discontent with who we are, where we are, what we have, what circumstance we face. Paul had good reason to be discontent given this personal passion and level of persecution and suffering. His intentions and dreams were often blocked by people and Satan. Yet Paul found the secret to not only being joyful no matter what, but content no matter what. He shared his secret in this letter to the Philippians.

A. Rely on Christ's power 4:10-13

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.

Paul found joy in the expression of the Philippians concern for him. Joy has been the theme throughout his letter. Paul's vital connection to Christ enabled him to rejoice no matter what. He rejoiced over the Philippians financial assistance delivered by Epaphroditus. Outside support was the only way a prisoner survived in that Roman system. He referenced a revived or blossoming concern or thought for him. The word used pictured a

perennial coming into bloom again in the spring. Its like the beautiful white and pink blossoms we see busting out right now.

The word “concern” communicates the idea of a directed thought. We say, “thinking of you”! or “You were in my thoughts today.” We mean our focus of attention centered on a particular person or issue.

He remembered their initial help.

You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. Philippians 4:15-16

That took place ten years earlier. It seems that they never lost their concern during that time but lacked an opportunity to show it. Paul used an imperfect form of the word for concern which indicates periodic times of concern as opposed to one time or continuous. He used that same tense for the word “opportunity” indicating they had no periodic times to do anything. They had not forgotten him but lacked an opportunity to do anything with it.

Paul clarified his reference to support.

Not that I speak from want

Paul wanted them to know this wasn't a “support letter”. He wasn't writing to get them to pledge to his support. He wasn't looking for donations to the cause. He didn't offer them a free book for their support. He didn't promise a matching gift. He wasn't encouraging “seed faith”. This was not a solicitation for funds. He simply thanked them for their concern for him by previous gifts and the current support received through Epaphroditus.

WHY?

...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.

“for” connects to the reason he was not writing from want or a short fall. He learned to continually be content no matter what or in whatever circumstance. He expanded what he meant by “whatever”.

His contentment applied all along the spectrum between nothing and much.

He contrasted being “humbled” with “abounding” or prospering.

He contrasted being filled with going hungry.

He contrasted having abundance with lacking provision.

We could think of others.

Health – sickness

Famous – unknown

Adored – persecuted

Accepted – rejected

Good job – difficult job

It is possible to become derailed by either end of this spectrum.

Two things I asked of You, do not refuse me before I die: Keep deception and lies far from me, give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is my portion, that I not be full and deny You and say, "Who is the LORD?" Or that I not be in want and steal, and profane the name of my God. Proverbs 30:7-9

Seventy percent of lottery winners end up bankrupt in five years or less. Others are negatively changed by the sudden flood of wealth. The Israelites failed to trust God in their times of want through the wilderness even though God proved Himself faithful to supply their need all along the way. He warned them not to forget Him when they finally got into the land of plenty.

"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. He led you

through the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water; He brought water for you out of the rock of flint. In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end. Otherwise, you may say in your heart, 'My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.' But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. Deuteronomy 8:11-18

Paul learned the key principle to remaining content in ANY and EVERY situation. The renewed thinking or perspective adjustment that enables such contentment is...

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

I can do all things though the one continually strengthening me.

The reason Paul found contentment in whatever circumstance is because he trusted Christ to strengthen him no matter the circumstance. The philosophers of the day promoted a contentment no matter what, but it depended solely on the efforts of the individual. Their kind of contentment would have nothing to do with humbling however. Theirs was a self-effort achieving contentment through acquisition. Paul found his contentment through the empowering of Christ either to overcome or endure whatever came his way. That also included being enabled to handle prosperity. The word “strengthen” means to infuse with power. Most of us are controlled by circumstances good or bad. Our attitudes and moods get jerked around by whatever circumstance comes our way. Good circumstances trigger joy. Negative circumstances trigger “attitude” and frustration.

Be careful to keep this truth in its context. It is not a promise to greatness but a promise to contentment. It is not a promise that we can do whatever we desire but enabled to face any circumstance we encounter in a God-honoring manner.

Paul experienced humbling, even a devastating physical impairment in order to keep humble. He also experienced exaltation when he was caught up into the third heaven.

To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things. 1 Corinthians 4:11-13

Paul learned to be content even in the extremes. Even the rich need Christ's strength to keep focused on what is most important.

Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed. 1 Timothy 6:17-19

Paul warned about the danger of desiring to be rich.

*If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the **love** of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. 1 Timothy 6:8-10*

God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. 2 Corinthians 9:8

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Isaiah 41:10

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." So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" Hebrews 13:5-6

Hebrews 11 is a major study in contrasts.

By faith some powerfully conquered circumstances.

Noah rescued from the flood.

Abraham called out of paganism.

Sarah granted a miracle baby.

Moses delivered Israel from bondage

Moses crossed the Red Sea on dry land.

Jericho fell before Joshua

Rahab was saved

And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Hebrews 11:32-35

On the other hand, others painfully endured their circumstances by faith.

Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. Hebrews 11:35-38

The secret?

Appropriating the power of Christ in any and every circumstance.

Learning to live by the energizing power of the Holy Spirit.