

“The Secret of Contentment”

September 28, 2025

Philippians 4:10-23

I. Introduction

Before bringing his letter of encouragement to a close, Paul wanted to express his gratitude to the Philippians for their generosity to him through the gifts brought by their messenger, Epaphroditus. As we have seen in our study of this letter, Paul had nothing but praise for the Christians who made up the church at Philippi. They had supported his ministry before and now they had again sent him gifts of money and fellowship. **Verses 10-19** were Paul’s thank-you note to them.

For several years, the church at Philippi had lost touch with Paul. They didn’t know where he was after he had been arrested in Jerusalem and then put in prison for 2 years in Caesarea. The next time they heard about him, he had been transferred to a prison in Rome. Most likely, they apologized for losing contact and for not being able to send him any gifts during that time. Paul excused them in a most gracious manner as he wrote, **“You have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.”**

In some ways, in today’s Scripture, we see a tortured Paul. He wanted to show his heart-felt appreciation to the Philippians for their support, both past and present. But how could he adequately say “Thank You” when the gifts came from people who could not afford it? The church in Philippi was poor and through the years had given beyond their resources—**turn to 2 Corinthians 8:1-5**. Paul had another problem, too: how to be a gracious receiver when his material needs and wants were so few? As he wrote in **verse 11**, he had **“learned to be content whatever the circumstances.”** Paul had learned through his many experiences serving God how to rejoice in every circumstance and to be free from anxiety and worry. His contentment wasn’t based on what *he* could do. He was content because his heart was guarded by the peace of God and by the God of peace. He wrote in **Phil. 4:7**, **“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”**

Contentment is not complacency, nor is it a false peace based on ignorance. Contentment is not escaping from the troubles, but rather an abiding peace and confidence in the midst of the trouble; as Paul

wrote in [Philippians 4:11](#), “[I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.](#)” In today’s Scripture, Paul gave 4 principles of contentment beginning with “trust in God’s oversight.”

II. Four Principles of Contentment

A. Trust in God’s Oversight In our day and our culture, we hear less and less about the oversight or providence of God. We sometimes get the idea that the world is a vast natural machine and that even God Himself can’t change the natural order of things. But the Word of God clearly teaches the providential workings of God in nature and in the lives of His people. God’s oversight or providence is the working of God in advance to arrange circumstances and situations for the fulfilling of His purposes. God supernaturally weaves events, words, actions, decisions, and elements of natural life to accomplish His purpose. God arranges things for His purpose. This is as supernatural as an instantaneous miracle. Solomon wrote in [Proverbs 16:9](#), “[In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps.](#)”

For example, God providentially arranged for Joseph to rise to a high position in Egypt to preserve His people—read the story of Joseph in [Genesis 37-50](#) sometime. As Joseph explained to his brothers in [Genesis 50:20](#), “[You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.](#)” God had providently arranged for Esther to be in a position to save Israel. As her Uncle Mordecai reminded her in [Esther 4:14](#), “[For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?](#)” Similarly, God in His providence had caused the church at Philippi to become concerned about Paul’s needs and their gifts came at the very time Paul needed their love the most! For a Christian, there is no such thing as “*luck*.”

Life isn’t a series of accidents; it is a series of appointments. In [Isaiah 42:16](#) God said, “[I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them.](#)” In [Genesis 22:14](#) Abraham called God “*Jehovah-Jireh*,” which means “[The LORD Will Provide.](#)” In [John 10:4](#) Jesus said, “[When he, i.e. the Good Shepherd, has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of](#)

them.” This is the providence of God—God orchestrating things, arranging things for His purpose. Trust in God’s oversight—trust in God’s providence leads to contentment.

B. Contentment is independent of circumstances. Concerned that the Philippians might misunderstand his statement in [verse 10](#) about their *eventual* support, Paul quickly let his friends know that he was not complaining about their absence and lack of support; he wrote, “I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.” This is the second principle of contentment: “Contentment is independent of circumstances.”

Paul’s statement that “I know what it is to be in need,” indicated that he knew what it meant to live in poverty—much of his life as a Christian seemed to be here. When he wrote, “I know what it is to have plenty,” he indicated that he also knew how to live in prosperity. Through the trials and testing’s that he had gone through, Paul had learned the secret of contentment in the midst of poverty or prosperity. Paul’s life, like those of many God-fearing men and women of the Bible, was not a testimonial for the prosperity gospel preachers, like Joel Olsteen; Paul had learned that contentment is independent of circumstances and things. He worked hard and was content to let God control the results. When difficult times came, Paul remained content because he was satisfied with little. In [1 Timothy 4:8](#) he wrote, “But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.” Paul had learned that you can make out of any circumstance what you want it to be—everyone has a choice: to be content or not. Paul knew that the chief end of man is not to have his needs met, but to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Because of this, Paul was satisfied with whatever God graciously granted him. [2 Corinthians 4:17](#) says, “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” With this attitude, circumstances couldn’t affect Paul’s contentment.

By comparison, in today’s society, people are not content with either little or much. In fact, it seems that the more one has, the more miserable and discontented they are. People are obsessed with listing their needs and loudly demanding that they be met. Need has become the number one value in our culture. To add to the discontent, the difference between “needs” and “wants” has disappeared—everything has become

a “need.” Because circumstances are continually changing, without God, there is no contentment. For Paul, for all Christians, contentment is independent of circumstances and things.

C. Trust in God’s Power Paul’s 3rd principle for contentment is found in [verse 13](#), “**I can do everything through him who gives me strength,**” i.e., trust in God’s power. No matter how difficult things got for Paul—whether spiritual or physical, he was able to overcome because of the inner, spiritual strength God had given him. He could be content because he trusted in God’s power; [Galatians 2:20](#) says, “**I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.**” [Turn to Isaiah 40:28-31](#). Paul depended on this power of God in his life. [Turn to 2 Corinthians 12:8-10](#). Contentment comes to believers who trust in God’s power and not their own.

In Jesus’ sermon on the vine and the branches in [John 15:1-8](#), the branch doesn’t bear fruit on its own, but by drawing life from the Vine. In [John 15:5](#) He said, “**I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.**” As the believer continues walking with Christ, the power of God will be there to see him through all circumstances. Those who live lives of obedience to God’s will can count on His power to see them through anything that comes their way. But those whose continued sin has lead them away from God cannot expect God to bring them contentment in their circumstances. [Psalm 66:18](#) says, “**If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.**” In fact, God may add to their difficulties to chasten them and bring them to repentance. [Hebrews 12:11](#) adds, “**No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have trained by it.**” God’s power will bring contentment to those who live righteously and rely on God’s strength and not their own.

D. Have concern for others Paul’s final principle for contentment is to “have concern for others.” Those who look out only for themselves will never be content because contentment for them can come only when their circumstances are exactly as they want them to be—and that never happens. Only those who

have the attitude of Jesus Christ and Paul, those who put the well-being of others above their own well-being, will find contentment.

Paul had just written to the Philippians that although, he didn't really need their sacrificial gifts to him, "it was good of you to share in my troubles." As important as their gifts were to him, their gifts were extremely important in God's plan. "They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God." Their generosity, along with Paul's hard work, had allowed him to minister free of charge in other cities and now in Rome. Paul could rejoice, not because of their gift's material benefit to him, but because of its spiritual benefit to them; he wrote, "Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account." Matthew 6:20 says, "But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal." Paul's concern for others, in this case the Philippian church, brought him contentment.

Paul looked on their gift, their ample and abundant gift, as a spiritual sacrifice, laid on the altar to the glory of God. Such spiritual sacrifices are required of New Covenant believers instead of the animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant. Hebrews 13:15-16 says, "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise-- the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased." Paul's joy that the Philippians had made an acceptable gift/sacrifice to God far outweighed his joy at receiving the gift itself.

Paul knew that the Philippians would not only receive spiritual blessings in heaven for their generosity, but also that God "will meet all your needs." As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 9:6, "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." God's riches in Christ Jesus are immense, unimaginable and He cannot be out given. Turn to Ephesians 3:16-21. Paul was able to be content because he was concerned about others and was assured of their well-being.

III. Closing Paul closed his Letter to the Philippians in the last 3 verses in the same way he opened it, with the grace of God; he wrote, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." Grace is the unmerited

favor or the undeserved love of God in Christ that brings about each believer's salvation. Believers are saved by grace, but they are also supported throughout their lives by the grace of God. [Romans 5:2](#) says that it is Jesus Christ **"through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand."** Without the grace of God, we would be the most miserable of people in this life and in the life to come. This is why Paul's continued prayer for them was that they receive God's matchless grace.

IV. Conclusion – The Secret of Contentment

Contentment is a highly prized, but elusive virtue. People seek contentment where it cannot be found-- in money, possessions, power, prestige, relationships, jobs, or freedom from difficulties. By the "human" definition, contentment is unattainable, it is impossible in this world to be completely free from problems; to have all the "things" one wants. True contentment comes only from being rightly related to God—being one of His children—and trusting His sovereign, loving, purposeful oversight or providence. In contrast to the world's understanding of contentment is this simple definition of spiritual contentment written by Jeremiah Burroughs, a Puritan: *"Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition."*

So here is the secret of contentment: 1) First, and most importantly, have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ—make Him your Savior and your Lord. [Acts 4:12](#) says, **"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."** If you haven't done this, the rest of this list is useless, rubbish. The oft-quoted verse [Romans 8:28](#) is only for Christians, it says, **"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him."** 2) Second, trust in God's oversight or providence—have faith in Him and His Word. 3) Third, choose to be satisfied in every circumstance—submit to God's will for your life. [Heb. 13:5](#) says, **"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.'"** 4) Fourth, trust in God's power and not your own—remember that **"we can do everything through him who gives us strength."** 5) Finally, like Christ Jesus, be concerned for others instead of yourself—be unselfish in all you say and do. If you do these things, you will be content.