

Contentment Comes from Giving

Scripture: Proverbs 3:9–10; Proverbs 11:24–25; Proverbs 19:17; Luke 6:38; 2 Corinthians 9:6; Philippians 4:14–19

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If you live for yourself, you will never be content. Many of us don't experience contentment because we demand our world to be exactly the way we want it to be. We want our spouse to fulfill our expectations and agenda. We want our children to conform to a prewritten plan we have ordained for them to fulfill. And we want everything else to fall into its perfect niche in the little cupboard where we compartmentalize every element of existence.

Paul prayed for the Philippians to have a different perspective. He began his letter to them with a prayer that their love for one another might abound (Philippians 1:9), and went on to give this practical advice: "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself" (Philippians 2:3). He wanted them to lose themselves by being preoccupied with the well-being of others. This was the example he gave to them and us:

Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction. And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the Gospel, after I departed from 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. Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. But I have received everything in full, and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:14–19).

Even though Paul was assured of God's providence, independent of his circumstances, and strengthened by divine power, he knew how to write a gracious thank-you note. He wanted the Philippians to know they had done a noble thing in caring for his needs. They were a poor church from Macedonia (an area whose poverty is described in 2 Corinthians 8–9) who had apparently sent food, clothing, and money to Paul in Rome through Epaphroditus. Their generosity impressed Paul.

Notice what made him happiest of all about the gift: "Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account" (Philippians 4:17). He was more interested in their spiritual benefit than his material gain. Being comfortable, well fed, and satisfied weren't Paul's main concerns in life. Rather, he was interested in accruing eternal dividends to the lives of the people he loved. Here are the timeless scriptural principles that apply:

- Proverbs 11:24–25: "There is one who scatters, yet increases all the more, and there is one who withholds what is justly due, but it results only in want. The generous man will be prosperous, and he who waters will himself be watered."
- Proverbs 19:17: "He who is gracious to a poor man lends to the Lord, and He will repay him for his

good deed.”

- Luke 6:38: “Give, and it will be given to you.”
- 2 Corinthians 9:6: “He who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully.”

Paul described the gift he had received as “a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God” (Philippians 4:18). He was using Old Testament imagery to say, “Not only did you give it to me, but you also gave it to God.” At the beginning of our passage, in verse 10, we noted how happy Paul was to receive the gift. His joy came not because he finally received what he had been wanting (as we saw in verse 11, he politely mentioned that he didn’t need it), but because the Philippians had given him something that honored God and would accrue to their spiritual benefit.

Their doing that led Paul to say in closing, “My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). That is one of the most often-quoted verses of Scripture, but it needs to be set in its context. Paul was saying, “You gave to me in a way that left you in need. I want to assure you that God will not remain in your debt. He will supply all your needs.” It refers to material, earthly needs sacrificed by the Philippians that God in response to their sacrifice would amply replenish.

If you likewise “honor the Lord from your wealth . . . your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine” (Proverbs 3:9–10). God’s not going to give you back spiritual blessings only and let you die of hunger. If you’re in Christ, the riches of God in glory are yours. That is why, as we learned in our first chapter, we are not to be preoccupied with what we eat, drink, or wear. Instead we are to “seek first His kingdom, and His righteousness; and . . . not be anxious” (Matthew 6:33–34).

Attack anxiety in your life by applying what you have learned about contentment. Be confident in God’s sovereign providence, and don’t allow your circumstances to trouble you. Instead of giving in to panic, cling to the promise of Romans 8:28: “We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God.” Regard that verse as a spiritual lifeline for the rest of your life.

Also, buck the tide of our materialistic, selfish society by being satisfied with little and more concerned about the spiritual welfare of others than your material needs. Be obedient to God’s Word and confident in His power to meet all your needs. May our Lord keep all these principles in the forefront of our minds that we might be content—and free from anxiety!

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