

## **Seven Keys to Contented Living**

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 80-21

I'd like you to open your Bible to Philippians chapter 4. You'll remember a few weeks ago I gave a couple of messages on the subject, "The sufficiency of Scripture." And we talked about the fact that Scripture, the Word of God, is sufficient for all the spiritual needs of the believer. And I want to add to that, if I might, a message this morning on the sufficiency of spiritual resources...the sufficiency of spiritual resources.

What prompts me to do this is what I perceive to be a somewhat pervasive discontent among Christians. Our society basically is built on discontent. The whole idea of advertising is to make you aware that you're discontent. You are appealed to with every commercial that comes across the television, the radio, everything you see in a magazine of a commercial nature, all the ads in the newspaper, they're all geared to make you dissatisfied with what you have. Frankly, all of the temptations of Satan are geared to do the same thing, to make you discontent with what you have, to make you discontent with your relationships, discontent with your possessions, discontent with your feelings, your emotions, and all of that...to basically breed dissatisfaction is what the world does. And sadly but somewhat predictably, the church catches those diseases. And so in the church today, as I look at the church on a wide scale, there is a very obvious discontent, there is a dissatisfaction in the lives of people and it is creating all kinds of spin-off effects.

For example, the very popular prosperity gospel, that is Jesus wants you healthy, Jesus wants you wealthy, Jesus wants you to have everything you want and if you don't have what you want and you're not healthy and you're not wealthy it's because you're not tapping into what Jesus wants you to have, that prosperity gospel will only succeed in a soil of dissatisfaction...where people are demanding this and demanding that and I want this and I want that is the attitude. Also, Christian people seem to have lost the ability to find within the power of the Spirit of God the spiritual resources for everything. And when things don't go the way they want to go, they run off to buy a book or go to a counselor or go to a seminar or try to figure out how to solve this thing to pursue something they do not have because they are basically dissatisfied with what they have. This is a pervasive spirit, the spirit of dissatisfaction, the spirit of discontent.

And I want to speak to that issue and Philippians chapter 4 allows me to do that because the heart of this text is to speak to the issue of contentment. The key verse would be verse 11 where Paul says, "I have learned in whatever state I am to be content." Now here was a man who knew what it was to be content. Can I give you a very simple understanding of what it means to be content? It means to

be able to say I have enough...I have enough, I'm satisfied. The word "contentment is a beautiful word. It's a wonderful word. It's a comforting word. It's a happy word. It's a rich word. But it's an uncommon word.

I rarely hear people who come to me and say, "Pastor, I just want to tell you how content I am. I just want to tell you how totally satisfied I am with everything in my life, as I see my life before the Lord, I'm so content." I rarely hear that.

The word "satisfaction" is another wonderful word. There was a song some years ago, "I can't get no satisfaction," that became sort of a byword and I think that is basically the attitude of most people's life. They're really not satisfied no matter what they have or don't have, what they gain or lose. The psalmist, on the other hand, said, "How excellent is Thy loving kindness, O God, therefore the children of men put their trust unto the shadow of Thy wings and they shall be abundantly satisfied," Psalm 36<sup>7</sup> and 8. The psalmist further said, "Because Thy loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise Thee, thus will I bless Thee while I live, I will lift up my hands in Thy name, my soul shall be satisfied," Psalm 63 verses 3 to 5.

Two Psalms later in Psalm 65 we read, "We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house, O God of our salvation." And in Psalm 107 verse 9 the text says, speaking of God, "For He satisfies the longing soul and fills the hungry soul with goodness." And what does Psalm 23:1 say? "The Lord is my shepherd...what's the next line?...I shall not want." Is that your testimony? Is that the testimony of your heart? The Lord is my shepherd, I have no needs, I have enough. Wouldn't it be wonderful if Christian people really gave that kind of testimony to the watching world? That we had found in our God and in the salvation that He provides and in the spiritual resources at our disposal total satisfaction, that we were absolutely content. A satisfied heart should be the experience of every single Christian. And contentment is a spiritual virtue and discontent is a sin. We should be content, we should be satisfied, we should be saying I have enough, nothing more is needed, nothing more is desired. We should know the attitude that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 6. You remember where He said, "Take no thought for what you shall eat or what you shall wear. Don't you realize God clothes the grass of the field, the lilies, takes care of the birds and you're far more precious than they so you spend your time and seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all the rest of these things shall be added." That speaks of a satisfied heart, a contented mind, righteous contentment.

Now admittedly, there is a sinful kind of contentment and I want to just refer to that momentarily so that you have a little bit of balance. There are people who do find contentment with sin...with wickedness.

Some people, also, are content with less than God's best. I think about Moses. In Exodus chapter 2 we find that Moses had tried to usurp leadership and to help his people with a sword. And he slew an Egyptian. And his ill advised effort at leadership meant that he had to flee the country or lose his life.

And so fleeing Egypt because of that effort, he lost his opportunity to lead his people out and he sulked in the desert. Finding himself in the home of a Medianite by the name of Jethro and in Exodus 2:21 in a rather sulkish mood, no doubt, as he sits there having been defeated on one front, now resigning himself to a life of defeat it says, quote: "Moses was content to dwell with the man." Moses who had been raised in the courts of Egypt to be a prince, Moses who had been called by God to lead his people was content to sit in the house of a foreigner in the middle of nowhere. Well, there are those people who having tried once and failed are content for less than God's best. And even when God later on called Moses back to Egypt to lead his people out, Moses was very reluctant to go. Some people are content with their sin and some people are content with less than God's best.

Some people, also, are content with less than a complete obedience to God. In Leviticus chapter 10 we again see the main character to be Moses. Moses has a brother named Aaron and Aaron is, of course, the head of the priests, he has four sons. Two of those sons engaging upon the priesthood offered strange fire unto God. That is, they attempted to carry out their priestly role in violation of the priestly prescription, they broke the law of God. And so they were killed on the spot, Nadab and Abihu were killed by God in Leviticus 10 for offering strange fire. They perhaps were drunken at the time. And it says in verse 3 that God demands complete obedience. And they didn't give it.

The two remaining sons, the two brothers of Nadab and Abihu, were Eleazar and Ithamar. And they were priests also. And when the bodies of their brothers were taken out to be buried, they were not allowed to leave the tabernacle because they were told to keep doing their priestly function. And they couldn't really even go to the funeral of their own brothers. Particularly were they instructed to offer a sin offering. And part and parcel of the sin offering was that the priests were to eat a portion of that offering. But rather than eat a portion of it, they burned the whole offering in violation of the law of sacrifice. When Moses found that out he was very angry because the law was clear in Leviticus 6:26 about what should happen. And Moses was angry about what they had done and asked for an explanation. And they gave the explanation that because of the death of their brothers they just didn't feel like eating. And it says that Moses was content with their explanation. Sympathy overruled his love of obedience and he was content with less than perfect obedience.

Strange because two brothers had given less than perfect obedience and it cost them their life. And here Moses does not even call for what has just caused the death of two brothers. That is, a perfect obedience. There are people who are content but it is a sinful contentment when they are content with less than a perfect obedience.

Some people are content with compromise. I'm reminded of the story in Judges 17 of a man named Micah. Micah lived in the area of Ephraim, Micah of Mount Ephraim. And he lived with his mother. And Micah did something a son ought never to do, Micah stole eleven hundred shekels of silver from his own mother. Well his mother was furious about it and so she pronounced a curse on the thief. And he was so worried by the curse that he confessed and he gave the eleven hundred shekels of

silver back to his mother and her response was an amazing response in Judges 17:2, it says, "She said to him, Blessed be thou of the Lord, my son." What a ridiculous thing to commend a son for confessing to a crime. He should have been disciplined but he was not. Instead the two of them decided to take the money, the silver, to a silversmith. So they took it to a silversmith who melted it down and shaped it into an idol. And also they made a carved idol, so they had a couple of idols. And so he had his own religion. It was a time, the Bible says, when there was no king in Israel and every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

Well here was Micah and his mother with their own private religion, their house of gods. And journeying along the path near them was a Levite, a true priest of Israel in the priestly line. When he runs into Micah, Micah makes a proposal and says, "I need a priest to run my religion. And I'll pay you ten shekels a year, ten shekels of silver a year, I'll provide all your clothing and room and board if you'll sign on as my official priest." And the Bible says in verse 10, "So the Levite went in and was content to dwell with the man and become his priest." What a compromise. A true priest bought by an apostate for money.

The priest was content to compromise. And Moses was content with less than a perfect obedience. And Moses was content with less than God's best. And the brothers of Joseph were content with their sin. There is a contentment that is an unrighteous contentment, and I'm not speaking of that. Pilate finally gave Jesus to the unruly blood-thirsty crowd, it says in Mark 15:15, because he knew it would content the people.

But there is a godly contentment. There is a righteous satisfaction that should be the portion of every believer. We should be able to say with Paul in Philippians 4:11, "I have learned in whatever state I am to be content. I know how to be abased, I know how to abound. In all things I am instructed to be full and to be hungry, to abound and suffer need." In other words, in any extremity of life, be it plenty or be it little, I know how to be content. And I really believe that that is missing in the church. People are dissatisfied. They always want more things, different circumstances, a better environment, another partner, freedom from problems. Instead of manifesting to the world satisfaction and contentment that shows our true trust in God and our true heavenly perspective, we get all caught up in the materialistic surge of our own society. And discontent is devastating personally, maritally, economically, in the church, everywhere.

The Apostle Paul in writing to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6 says, "Godliness with contentment is great gain." Godliness and contentment, that ought to be enough. Hebrews 13 verse 5, "Be content with such things as you have." How often do we meet a truly satisfied person? A truly content person? No matter what it is they have or don't have...that's what Paul calls for here.

Now the reason he gives us chapter 4 is really a personal insight into his own contentment. It is apparent to me that the Philippians were under some stress. Chapter 1, for example, verse 28,

"Don't be terrified by your adversaries," he says, "in nothing terrified by your adversaries." Which is to say that there was reason on a human level to be afraid. They had strong adversaries that were terrorizing them. Verse 29 he says, "You're supposed to expect to suffer." And verse 30 even says, "You have somewhat the same conflict that I have." Now Paul had known tremendous conflict. At the time he wrote this he was changed to a Roman soldier, a prisoner in Rome. He had been deprived of his freedom. He was being abused by critics. People were slandering his name, as we found in chapter 1 earlier, some were supposing to add affliction to his bonds, verse 16 of chapter 1. And he says you've got a little of the same, you know what it is to be persecuted, to have people hate you, to have people move against you, you understand that. They were enduring some difficulty. There's little question of that.

And there was always that potential of discontent, of feeling like you weren't getting what you deserved. And I believe that in light of that, Paul pens this fourth chapter to give them a model of a contented man. And I want us to look at this chapter and discern in it those things which identify true contentment. We're going to start at verse 1 and we'll just touch lightly because our time is limited.

How can we learn to live like Paul? How can we while we're in prison, while we're chained to a soldier, while we're deprived of our freedom, while we're being criticized, ridiculed, slandered by others, how can we come to the place where we can say I'm content, I've learned how to be empty and to be full, to have and to not have, to suffer need and to have no need? I don't care what the condition, I know what it is to be content, how can we know that contentment? How can I as a Christian be content with what I have? How can I learn to be able to say every waking day of my life, "God I have enough," "My lot has fallen in pleasant places...I'm a satisfied person?" Take away what I have, give me more and you cannot impact my contentment, how can I learn to live like that?

Well the answer comes in this text as we hear from the example of Paul. First of all, contentment comes from appreciating the fellowship of love...contentment comes from appreciating the fellowship of love, verses 1 to 3. I do not believe that contentment has anything to do with what you possess. I do not think that contentment of the heart and soul has anything to do with whether you're healthy or whether you're ill. I do not think it has anything to do with whether you're married or single, in the spiritual sense. Contentment is a heart attitude that accepts what God has given in His grace. Contentment does have to do with appreciating the fellowship of love.

Now I don't want to go into the detail but notice the first three verses. "Therefore," and, of course, that is an indication of what just came before in verses 20 and 21, "Since our citizenship is in heaven, since we are strangers in the earth, foreigners, citizens of a heavenly land, since we are waiting for our glory, our lowly body to be made like His glorious body when Christ returns, we're not earthbound." Since we're living for the next life, he says, we need to...and the main verb, verse 1, stand fast in the Lord. I mean, get your focus clear. Don't waver. Don't fall. Don't falter. Don't stumble. Hold together in the Lord. That's sort of a...that's sort of the over all exhortation here.

Stand fast. And part of that standing fast means to stand with contentment or satisfaction.

And notice what he has to say about that in just a general look at these verses. "Therefore, my brethren, dearly beloved, and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved." Now, he's gushing in verse 1, frankly, with affection. It's just oozing out of him. "My brethren, dearly beloved, and longed for, that is I have strong desire to be with you, my joy, my crown, my dearly beloved."

Now all of those terms are expressive of Paul's tremendous love for the fellowship. And his contentment, I believe, was all bound up in loving relationships. It is essential. In fact, in chapter 1 he says, "I know there are some who speak about me with love, knowing I am set for the defense of the gospel." Paul relished that loving relationship that he shared with the Philippians and they with him. And I believe that contentment in large measure comes when a person realizes that he or she is a part of a loving family whom we need and who needs us.

In fact, back again in chapter 1, he says, "Of course, if I had my way I would rather go and be with Christ," verse 23, "which is far better, but...verse 24...nevertheless, to stay in the flesh is more needful for you...for you." So he says in verse 25, "I know I'm going to remain and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith." In other words, I'd like to go to be with Lord but I need to stay here because I need to minister to you. See, life for him was all bound up in loving relationships and ministry among the saints.

Chapter 2, he talks about comfort of love, verse 1, fellowship of the Spirit, tender mercies, compassion, being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind, talks about humility, about having the mind of Christ which is the mind of condescending humility that steps down and takes the role of a servant. Real contentment doesn't come from self-seeking, it doesn't come from saying, "I want this and I want that and I demand this and I've got to have that and why doesn't the Lord give me," real contentment comes when I see myself as a part of a loving fellowship. And my joy is bound up in that.

For me, contentment personally comes from the love of my family,

the love of my friends and my church, the give and take to know I'm loved and to have the privilege to love. Therein lies contentment. That's where it really comes from. It comes in relationships, people. It doesn't come in possessions. The richness of life is to love and be loved and it only grows in the soil of humility. It doesn't grow in the soil of self and pride and self-seeking and grasping and demanding.

And he illustrates this love in verses 2 and 3. Two women, Euodia and Syntyche, two women. They were a problem in the church. They were a rather severe problem in the church. They were obviously

arguing and their argument had reached somewhat major proportions. And so he says, "I beg them to be of the same mind in the Lord." And there's a very warm, loving pleading there because Paul loves these women. And he says in verse 3, "I entreat you also, true yoke fellow," that may be a proper name, Syzygos, there might have been a person named Syzygos there, he says, "You straighten them out." It may be a descriptive term referring to Epaphroditus, it's very possible that he is asking Epaphroditus who was associated with the Philippian church and he calls him "yoke fellow" meaning he's a good team player, he really knows how to work in a double harness. Or it may be simply a way to describe another unknown person to us.

But anyway, he says, "On behalf of these women I want you...and they would know who the true yoke fellow was...I want you to help those women." You see, life is relationships and the church is relationships so they need some help. And they're wonderful women, they labored with me in the gospel. They labored with Clement and they labored with other fellow workers and their names are in the Book of Life. He loved those women. I mean, he gave a lot to start this church. There was a tremendous investment and he could have been very angry with two women who were doing everything they could to split it, but he expresses love to them. And he calls for humility and he calls for a working together, a coming together in one so that that love may continue.

You see, loving is born out of service and caring and bearing and sharing and fellowshiping in mutual ministry, contending together for the faith, mutually supporting each other. So realize you're loved. I mean, realize that you're a part of a family that loves you. And love to be loved, share your needs, share your struggles and you find your contentment in the love in which you exist. And as I said, it grows in the soil of humility. It doesn't grow in the soil of selfishness. The greatest joys in life are found in loving relationships. And here is Paul, a prisoner, and it's almost that he's reaching out to the Philippians because he's so expressive of his affection in verse 1. He so demonstrates that affection in verses 2 and 3. He so longs for them in chapter 2 verse 17 that he said, "I'd die for you, I would die for you, I would offer myself as a sacrifice if it would bring you joy." Now that..that's the place you find contentment. Not in what you possess but in sharing the love of the fellowship. Do all you can to cultivate that.

Secondly, contentment requires not only sharing in the love of the fellowship but cultivating a spirit of rejoicing...cultivating a spirit of rejoicing. Look at verse 4. He says to them and this from his own personal experience, "Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice." He calls for them to rejoice. Now this is a command. By the way, we are called to rejoice about 70 times in the New Testament. This is a present imperative which means he calls us to habitual continual practice of rejoicing. Always at all times rejoice and in case you didn't get that, I said rejoice. Emphatically he commands us twice to rejoice. And he doesn't say rejoice in your circumstance, he doesn't say rejoice in spite of your circumstance, he says rejoice in the Lord. It's all a question of focus. You're not rejoicing in the world. You're not rejoicing in the struggles. You're not rejoicing in the things going on around you. You're rejoicing in the Lord. Now the fact that it's a command means that it can be

obeyed and that you're responsible to obey it and not to obey it is a disobedience.

You say, "Well wait a minute, you can't command people to rejoice. You can't go up to somebody and say, 'Rejoice!' I don't care what your problem is, rejoice." Well that's exactly what Paul does.

But what he's really after is to cultivate an attitude of rejoicing and that's a training process. Teach your heart to rejoice. Train your heart to rejoice no matter what the circumstances are. Cultivate that in your life and again, I believe that joy grows in the soil of humility. The reason people don't rejoice is because they think they're getting some dirty deal, they think they're not getting what they deserve. But if you realize as a sinner you deserve nothing, then anything God gives is cause for joy. Or the fact that He spares your life is cause for joy. Or just the fact that He redeemed you is cause for surpassing joy. This is a command. The Kingdom of God is righteousness and joy and peace in the Holy Spirit, it says in Romans 14:17. And you can rejoice like the psalmist in Psalm 33, right after chastening he pours out his rejoicing. And again in Psalm 63 at a time when he's running from his own son, Absalom, David cries out to God about his joy. Train your heart to rejoice. Train your heart to respond in that manner. You have to train yourself. You have to cultivate that. You have to teach yourself that kind of response. Instead of finding everything that's wrong, instead of being saddened by all your apparent deprivations, instead of getting under the pressure and one out of twenty Americans, by the way, will have a psychotic disturbance severe enough this year to put them in a hospital for the insane, a lot of very miserable people...you cultivate joy and happiness is a choice. You choose it or you choose against it.

To choose against rejoicing is sinful. So train your heart to rejoice. Contentment then...and we're just highlighting these, I wish we had time to dig more deeply in to "how tos" but I'll leave that to you and the Spirit of God...contentment comes to those then who live within the loving fellowship of the saints and who cultivate with diligence the habit of rejoicing.

Thirdly, contentment also demands learning to accept less than your due. Learning to accept less than your due. Look at verse 5, "Let your moderation be known unto all men." Sometimes it's translated "gentleness." The word "moderation" is the word *epieikes*, it means reasonableness. It means a humble patient steadfastness that is able to endure humiliation, disgrace, injustice, mistreatment without hatred, without bitterness, without retaliation, without self-justification and without discontent. Some have called it "sweet reasonableness," that is willing to settle for very little...very little. Oh what a welcome...welcome person is this kind of person who will settle for very little. And yet so much of the time, we are at a demand level that there is no one in our life able to meet that demand. And that's what fractures marriages, the unrealism of that. That's what destroys relationships. The sweet reasonableness of the Apostle Paul which he enjoins upon the Philippians and us is the attitude that says I will settle for very little. And he says let that be known to all men, let it be so obvious and let it be so much the character of your life that it is transparent that you are a living testimony to contentment.

By the way, this same term is used of Christ in 2 Corinthians 10:1. He had that sweet reasonableness along with meekness, Paul says. When the devil came to Him he only tempted Him to take the things that He was due. Why should You, the Son of God, starve, having nothing to eat for 40 days, You're the Son of God, turn those stones into bread. You have every right to satisfaction. Why should You be despised by men, go to the pinnacle of the temple and dive off and they'll see Your supernatural power and they'll bow down to You and You have a right to their worship. Why should You not possess the kingdoms of the earth, bow down to me, I'll give them to You, they're Yours rightfully. He was offering Christ everything He was due but Christ in His humiliation and His condescension had resigned Himself to take less than His due. Gratefully so, to fulfill the will of God.

Some suggest that the root of *epieikes* is *eiko* which means to yield. It is the spirit of yieldedness. It is the spirit that doesn't demand rights and doesn't demand privileges and doesn't demand possessions, doesn't demand health or wealth or anything, prestige or honor or success. It's sweet reasonableness that is willing to settle for less than it is due.

Contentment then doesn't come from what you possess. It doesn't come from what you own. It doesn't come from your bank account, your security, your future, your retirement. It doesn't come from any of those things that the world has to offer, you're not even a citizen of this world. This isn't even our dimension. Contentment belongs to believers who share in the fellowship of love and who share richly in the love of the saints, who cultivate the habit of joy in the Lord in everything and who do not demand all they think they are due.

And then fourthly, contentment involves also standing on a confident faith in the Lord. Verse 5 and the first part of verse 6, verse 5 says, "The Lord is at hand, be anxious for nothing." Now that is not an eschatological statement, that is not talking primarily about the Second Coming of Christ, although there are implications as to the Lord's Second Coming. The point here is the presence of Christ. The Lord is near, why are you worrying? I daresay, is it not true, and be honest, that if Jesus Christ in human flesh was walking around with you all the time, your anxiety level would be reduced greatly. Is that not true? Why would you worry? About what would you worry? The Lord is there. You would be absolutely invincible.

Well, the fact of the matter is your present level of anxiety is inexcusable because whether you can see Him or not, He is there. And that is what the author is saying. Don't forget the Lord's nearness. And I'm always reminded of Paul Reese's wonderful story about the man who in World War II was on an American ship that was shot and was sinking and he dove off the deck and hung on to something in the water for a while until he was picked up by a German freighter. He and a couple of other men were thrown in the belly of the ship as prisoners. And he wrote in his little biography, "I began to commune with the Lord. At first I couldn't sleep. The stress was great and the fear was great. Then I remembered the words of Psalm 121, 'My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.

He that keeps thee will not slumber, behold he will neither slumber nor sleep.' So I said, 'Lord, there isn't any use both of us staying awake. As long as You're going to keep watch, I'll thank You for some sleep.' And I got it."

I mean, that's the trust that says the Lord is at hand. Why am I filled with anxiety, He's near. He is my true security, not my money, not my land, not my house, not my investments, not my mental ability, not my skill. The Lord is my hope and the Lord is my contentment.

Psalm 31, what a wonderful Psalm. There's so many Psalms that are coming to mind, I can't read them to you. Verse 1, "In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust. Never let me be ashamed. Deliver me in Thy righteousness." And then at the end of the Psalm, "O love the Lord, all you His saints, for the Lord preserves the faithful. Plentifully rewards the proud doer. Be of good courage. He shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord." Read the whole Psalm, it's almost a sin to leave out any verse. "I trusted in Thee, O Lord, I said, Thou art my God."

You see, contentment is built upon a confident trust in the presence of God. I thought about it in my own life this week. I have a lot of responsibility. I have responsibility for the security and the happiness and the joy of my wife and my four wonderful children and daughter-in-law, in many ways I feel responsible for their lives, of course. And that is a grave responsibility to me. I have responsibility as a shepherd of the sheep at Grace Church, a great responsibility. I have responsibility to the radio and tape ministry, to the Master's College, a lot of responsibility, expectations that people have of me in many different areas. With all of that responsibility, I want you to know something. And I thank God for this continually in my life. I never lose any sleep. I sleep very well. I get my rest because I don't see any point in worrying about all that. I'm content that God is able and that He is here, that He is present, that He walks with me every day. So what am I going to accomplish by high level anxiety? What am I going to gain?

As someone wrote, "I cannot know why suddenly the storm should rage so fiercely around me in its wrath, but this I know, God watches all my path." That's really all I care about.

And so, the Lord is near, he says, what are you worrying about? There's your contentment. Nothing comes on you that isn't in His power, no anxiety needs to be carried when an omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent God is with you. So stop worrying. Stop being discontent and trust.

Well what are we saying then in the summary? Contentment is the product of living in love among the saints, the richness of mutual love. It is the product of cultivating joy in the heart. It is the product of facing life with a patient humble sweet reasonableness that accepts very little and never makes demands. It is the product of a confident trust in a sovereign God who promises to be sufficient. This is contentment.

Fifthly, contentment also calls for reacting to our problems with thankful prayer...reacting to our problems with thankful prayer. Verse 6, "But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God and the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Did you get that? The promise here is that if you'll pray, offering your prayer and supplication, that is your petitions, with thanksgiving, if you'll just let those things be known to God, you'll have peace. Now mark this. It doesn't say when He gives you the answer you want you'll have peace, he says, you'll know peace when you just learn to take them to Him. Whatever the answer. Because prayer strengthens the relationship. Prayer builds the confidence. Prayer shifts the burden. It displaces the weight off me on Him. It isn't the answer that brings me the peace, it is the communion that does it. And the heart of this prayer is thankfulness in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. Whenever you pray, whatever the exigency, whatever the vicissitude, whatever the struggle, the problem of life, you pray thanking God for His purpose in it, thanking God for His providential working, thanking God for His promise of ultimate perfection and resolution, thanking God that relief is coming, thanking God for joy in the morning, thanking God for future glory, thanking God for past mercies, thanking God that what's happening fits in His plan. Learn to pray thankfully.

No prayer should be mostly petition, all prayer should be mostly thanksgiving. Contentment comes not from getting the answer I want but just from taking the burden and giving it to Him. Why should I carry that thing? Casing all your care on Him, Peter says, for He...what?...He cares for you. I'm not going to carry the load if He'll carry it. Believing prayer with a heart of thanksgiving is the cure for anxiety. And anxiety, believe me, is the gasoline poured on the fire of discontent. If you want to know the peace of God, that is the rest and confidence and tranquil contentment that only God can give that guards, that is it keeps your mind, it guards it from anxiety, it guards it from dissatisfaction, then learn to pray with thanksgiving instead of always begging begging for what you don't have and always wanting wanting wanting. Go to God with thanksgiving and you'll find the peace of God. Recite to God all the past mercies that He's done. Whatever the answer, the peace comes and shifting the burden in the expression of thanks to the God whose promise you believe.

Sixthly, contentment comes from focusing on positive things. Contentment comes from focusing on positive things. Look at verse 8, "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true," that means whatever is truth, focus on truth, don't deal in fantasies and don't deal in lies, focus on truth, "Whatever things are honest," that word means worthy of respect, noble, dignified, reverent, lofty, "whatever things are just," that's the word dikaios for righteous, whatever things are pure, hagnos is morally pure, morally undefiled, whatever things are lovely, means pleasing, winsome, amiable, attractive. Whatever things are of good report, that means worthy of praise. Listen to that. Whatever is truth, whatever is noble, whatever is righteous, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing and attractive and winsome, whatever is worthy of praise, if you have any moral excellence, if there's any virtue in you, if there's anything in you worthy of praise, then you will be thinking on these kinds of things. What he is saying is, you'll

find contentment in your life even if you're a prisoner like me, you'll find contentment even if you've been shipwrecked, even if you've been stoned until dead, even if you've been beaten with rods, even if you've been whipped, you'll find contentment even when you're slandered and ridiculed and deprived, you have nothing in the world when you learn to think on the positive things, the noble and the good and the holy and the righteous things. And the focus of all of that has to be around the Word of God. Use your faculty on those things continually, the verb is saying, the verb for think. Train yourself to be positive. Now I'm not talking here about some game you play with yourself in positive thinking, I'm talking about not imagining things to be positive when they're not, I'm saying focus on the positive truth of the revealed Word of God.

You see, discontent is the result of negative thinking. You think about self all the time, you think about your problems all the time, your suffering your lack, your mistreatment, your abuse, everybody's doing this to you, you don't have this, this isn't working out, your wife doesn't understand you, your husband doesn't understand you. Something was wrong when your kids arrived, it isn't your fault, they came into the world this way with some kind of bent going the wrong direction. You've gotten the dirty end of the stick from start to finish, that kind of thinking, that negative thinking cultivates depression.

I really...I really feel it is so essential to train yourself to think positively. If there's any moral excellence, if there's anything in you to be worthy of praise, it will be when you have learned to set your thoughts on things above and not on things on the earth. When the Word of Christ dwells in you richly so that you speak to yourself in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs and you go around singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, that's a person who is thinking on these things. The contented person has a mindset that is positive toward the things of God and what happens in this world is of little consequence.

So contentment then flows from a mind, appreciating the fellowship of love, cultivating joy, accepting very little with sweet reasonableness, standing strong in trust on God, engaging in thankful prayer and focusing on positive things. And then finally, and this is important, I believe contentment and satisfaction in life comes from following the right example, following the right example. Look at verse 9, "Those things which you have learned and received and heard and seen in me," Paul says what? "Do them and the God of peace shall be with you." The God who dispenses peace will be there dispensing His peace. He'll have contentment, satisfaction, tranquility of heart...now note this...when you follow my pattern.

Now let me give you a very basic and helpful principle. All of this kind of principle orientation that I've been given you fleshes out in verse 9. If you want to learn to be a content person and you want to learn to be a satisfied person, find somebody like that and pattern your life after them. You need a model. Paul says, "Take me as your model, pattern your life after me." That's why I am such a total believer in the fact that you cannot infuse into a group of people a negative person without that

person having a very very serious effect. In fact, I told you some years ago that my basic principle is if you have a negative person in your organization. If you can't fire them, pay them to stay home. If they won't stay home, rent them an office in another building. Don't let them near your people. They're a disease. They can destroy a work. People need a model that is positive, a model that is content and satisfied. And Paul says, "You see me, you know that I have been stripped of everything. I have...he says in verse 11...had to learn how to be content in any state, I didn't know this." No doubt raised in a prosperous Jewish family, no doubt educated at the feet of Gamaliel indicated that he had some resources in this world. He didn't know what it was to have a deprived life until he got into the ministry. So he says, "I've learned what it is to have my contentment in God." Now he says, "I know that pattern and I live that pattern, you follow my pattern. Find somebody who is positive. And if you identify a negative person, stay away from them. They'll poison your thinking. Practice habitually what I model for you," he says.

And he goes on to discuss it. And he thanks them for the gift in verse 10 that they gave. Your care flourishing...they had sent him a gift of money. And he says in verse 11, "I really...I'm not saying thanks because I wanted this, it wasn't something I wanted. If the Lord sent it, fine. If He didn't, I have enough. I'm satisfied, I'm content. I know how to be abase and how to abound. I know how to be full and to be hungry, to abound and suffer need. And I can handle it all through Christ who strengthens me. Nevertheless, you did well when you gave it. Please don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying I didn't want it, I'm not saying you shouldn't have done it, I'm so glad you did it. I'm so glad you did it. You're the only ones that did it," he says in verse 15. "And you've done it before...verse 16...when I was in Thessalonica, you did it. You're so generous and I really...I don't need it, I didn't want it, I wouldn't ask for it but I'm so glad you did it." Why? Verse 17, "Not because I desire a gift but I desire fruit that may abound to your account." I'm so glad you did it because it's fruit demonstrating your righteousness that God's going to put on His record. I have everything, verse 18, I mean, I'm abounding.

It's amazing, isn't it? In chains....I'm full. Life is wonderful. And this gift from you and what Epaphroditus told me about you is an odor of a sweet smell, a spiritual sacrifice well pleasing to God. You see, he found his joy in those relationships, he's back to that loving relationship again. He's so positive. I mean, he is so positive. He's looking on the side of joy no matter what his situation. He expects so very little with sweet reasonableness. He stands strong and trusted that God has put him there for a reason. He engages in thanksgiving. He focuses on what is positive, the good and the true and the best. He's not all caught up in his deprivation. He's an example.

And then he concludes by saying, "By the way, don't think you've depleted your resources by giving to me," because verse 19 says, "my God will supply all your need according to His riches and glory by Christ Jesus." The Lord will fill it back up again. Here's the bottom line in contentment, he knew the source of everything was God. That's how he lived and that's why he's a perfect example of that.

So what does it mean then to be content? Well, for a Christian it's to live a life of love in the fellowship. It's to cultivate joy. It's to have a spirit of humility that is willing to take less than it is due and demand nothing. It is the attitude that says, "I trust God, He's near, He's right here, He'll take care of everything." It is the attitude of thankful prayer, it is a positive focus on what is right. And it is finding a model and an example in following that pattern.

The satisfied heart can say with Paul, "I have enough." "I have all things," Peter says, 2 Peter 1:3, "that pertain to life and godliness." I have everything. And all I care about is life and godliness. I don't care about this world, I just care about my life before God, that's all I care about, that's my preoccupation. Take everything the world has to offer and you cannot take my contentment. Give me things that the world has to offer and you cannot increase my contentment. My contentment is in the Lord.

I close with some words from Susan Coolidge. "Father, how I can thus be bold to pray that Thou shalt grant me that or spare me this? How should my ignorance not go astray? How should my foolish lips not speak amiss and ask for woe when feign they would ask for bliss? How shall I dare to prompt Thee, the all wise, to show me kindness? Thou art ever kind. What is my feeble craving in Thine eyes which view the centuries vast before, behind and sweep unnumbered worlds like viewless wind? Thy goodness ordereth what things shall be. Thy wisdom knoweth even my inmost want. Why should I raise a needless prayer to Thee or importune omnipotence to grant my wishes, dim, short-sighted, ignorant? And yet I come, for Thou hast bidden and said but not to worry Thee or specify a wish, but rather with this prayer instead, 'O Lord, Thou knowest, give it or deny. Fill up the cup of joy or pass me by. Just as Thou wilt is just what I would will. Give me but this, the heart to be content. And if my wish is thwarted to lie still waiting till puzzle and pain are spent, and the sweet thing made plain that Thou hast meant.'" Let's bow in prayer.

Father, we would pray too that You would give us the heart to be content and if our wish is thwarted to lie still waiting till puzzle and pain are spent and the sweet thing made plain which Thou hast meant, Lord, help us to live with contented hearts, hearts which can say I have enough, I'm satisfied...that the world may know that our satisfaction is in Thee, that our contentment is in Thee and that contentment which they seek so aggressively in the things of the world and know they never find having been seen in us will attract them to Christ. Make us content for the Savior's glory. Amen.

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