

## **An Expression of Pastoral Gratitude**

Philippians 4:10-20

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Actually it was June 15th when I think I left for what was expected to be a couple of months of rest and reading and refreshment. It started out that way and I had a couple of books I wanted to read, one of them is a book that is a theological look at the gospel of Mark. I wanted to read the whole thing because, of course, we're going through Mark and I was able to do that. Another is a very important kind of scholastic book that treats the textual problems that occur at the end of the gospel of Mark and I wanted to read that as well, kind of loading up for our journey through the gospel of Mark. Had a number of other books that I wanted to read. I wanted to complete the biography of John Peyton, one of my favorite missionary heroes, I was able to do that and it had a profound affect on my own heart, my own soul. So there were things like that in my mind, and perhaps a little rest from the constant ministry that usually fills up my life.

What I didn't expect and couldn't have anticipated was that somewhere along the time when I was away, I started to have increased pain in my back and my hip. I'm not going to give you a whole medical history here. But it was pretty much chronic and it was pretty much daily and my precious wife, Patricia, would hear my comments every morning as I would wake up and say, "Well I don't know where that comes from, that's new," but that's not fun.

So eventually in her desire to care for me, she commiserated with some of the kids and said, "Look, you're going to need to go and get your back x-rayed and your hip x-rayed, we've got to find out what's wrong with you." So sometime in August after the wonderful time in celebrating Clayton's 30th, I did that. I came here to a highly recommended wonderful Christian orthopaedic surgeon and they took pictures of my hip and my back and they said... "Perfect hip, perfect back, no issues. Really bad knee. And the knee is such a severe problem that it's affecting your back, it's all a question of all the angles are off, and the compensation shows up in the pain in your back and the knee is so bad it has to be replaced."

Now I could actually write my life story around the history of my right knee. And there are some interesting intervals in my life that relate to my right knee. I made the first great sacrifice of my right knee to my football coach when I played football in my college university days. I made the ultimate sacrifice, as football players do, throwing my body recklessly into the melee game after game after game. And I did this primarily for the coach who was an overwhelming and overpowering personality in my life who demanded that kind of commitment. So I made the first sacrifice of my knee to my coach in an effort to fulfill all his desires for me.

I remember one time I injured my knee in a game and I came off to the sideline and he said to me, "You're not allowed to be injured, get back in there." And in those days, what they would do is spray your knee with ethyl chloride. Ethyl chloride was some kind of a thing that froze the thing a little bit so you couldn't feel the pain so you could do more damage without even realizing it. And that's

essentially what I did. And I made that sacrifice for my beloved coach, Jim Brownfield.

And I suppose there was a sense in which in my own heart I maybe I went overboard in being every bit of what he wanted me to be as an athlete and a player because I had a desire to see him come to Christ and he was not a Christian and acknowledged that he wasn't a Christian. And I had opportunity as a player to witness to him and to talk to him about the Lord, but he never would positively respond, although I really admired him and had great affection for him and I think he did for me. He never came to Christ.

Well something wonderful happened in the last few months. I had the privilege of visiting him in the hospital when he was near death and I just showed up at his bed and they said he hasn't moved or spoken in three days. He had massive heart issues and surgery and all that and they said, "We don't know if he'll respond." And I said, "Well we're going to find out."

So I leaned over the bed and I took a hold of his hand and I said, "Hey Coach, this is Johnny Mac." He always called me Johnny Mac. And I said, "Hey Coach, this is Johnny Mac." And he opened his eyes and he nodded at me and at that moment I said to him, "You're the thief on the cross and this is your hour. You've rejected Christ long enough." And I gave him the gospel and he responded.

And in the months since then has continued with joy to recover and to rejoice in his faith in Christ and to acknowledge it and proclaim it. It was 50 years ago that I first met him and after 50 years, and what his testimony always is and he said this the other day when I was down to visit him, he said, "The message of this story is don't give up on anybody...50 years later."

So, that's a little story that started when I first injured my knee. Through the years obviously things happen and it deteriorated and all that. Never want to take time to do it, to get it fixed. I had an orthoscopic incident a few years ago in which I got some blood clots in my lungs and that didn't seem like a good idea to do that again because you can die from that. And so, but the Lord used that in marvelous ways in my life because the surgeon who did the...who saved my life at that point came to our church after that. He said, "I want to hear you preach." He had never heard me preach and he said, "The first Sunday you're back, I want you to come....I want to come, I want to hear you preach." My first Sunday back was the first Sunday I started in Luke and my first sermon was, "Luke, the beloved physician," that's the first time he heard me. And out of that he came and continued to come and came to Christ and the story goes on.

So incidents with my knee somehow lead to people being converted. Sometimes it's a long way off but...so this is a very spiritual knee. It is a high-impact knee. I'm not sure what its future is, but the past as been quite notable. Anyway, they took one look at my knee and said, "You have to have this fixed now or you're going to have worse pain. It's way overdue."

So anyway I was in great hands. Many of you have had those kinds of total hip replacement, total knee replacement, that's all it was. It was just the normal kind of thing. And I'm in the process of recovering and I'm doing it a little slower pace because it was a little more damaged than they thought and a little more complicated recovery. I feel great, I'm on schedule for recovery. So far the good news is it hasn't affected my brain as far as I can tell. It certainly hasn't affected my will. So I'll just keep working on it. There's probably another two months of therapy to get me where I can straighten it out and bend it which is a pretty good idea to be able to function fully. But I am ready to

return to the things that the Lord has given me to do.

The one question I had was I'm not sure how long I can stand in one place on one leg. And part of it is because you're in so much therapy, to intense that your muscles are sore and trying to prop yourself up on a half-bent leg doesn't work real well. So I have a little box under here and he gave me a stool which I think I can sit on without being rebaptized here. Sort of auto-baptism.

But anyway, I'm doing well on the physical side. I'm very grateful for very wonderful doctors and people who took good care of me. I'm thankful for that kind of care that I was able to receive.

I always discover something when I'm away. And it was again the story, obviously I'm in touch with Rick. Rick is absolutely incredible in staying in touch with me every day, numerous times a day. He's a great leader, a faithful shepherd not only of you but of me. He shepherds me through all these times when I'm not here. But the reports are always so encouraging when he would call me.

Usually after church on Sunday morning on his way home, he called me after church Sunday night, he called me during the week and tells me how it's going, to tell me what are the issues that are going on, what are the things we need to be praying about, concerned about. What's going on with the giving. What's going on in the ministries. And the reports just were good and it was so encouraging to me. And I basically have come to the conclusion that I need Grace Church a whole lot more than Grace Church needs me. You...you do very well when I'm not here. You have great teachers, great ministry leadership. You're faithful, you pray, you worship, you give, you serve. You know, people say to me very often, you know, realizing my age, they say, "Well what's going to happen when you leave? What's going to happen when you're not here?"

Well there's already been an answer given to that question. You've lived the answer to that question in the months of my absence. And the work goes on, it goes on with great power and blessing. But from a personal standpoint, I don't do well not being here. Look, 40 years of my life and Patricia's life and the life of our children, our grandchildren, this is my place, this is my home, this is my spiritual home, you're my spiritual family. And to one degree or another, you touch my life, some of you obviously through the years more intensely than others. But this is where I belong. This is my place on planet Earth. This is my little bit of heaven on Earth.

And for whatever benefit I might bring to the church, the church brings an infinitely greater benefit to me. You are really in every sense the source of my own sanctification because it is my opportunity to preach to you that allows the Word to do its sanctifying work in my life. And you are the point of my great encouragement because I see and I hear testimonies like this and repeated testimonies day in and day out. You are the source of my joy. You are the source of my encouragement. That's why Paul says, "You are my joy and the crown of rejoicing," to the Philippians. Only a pastor gets that. Only a pastor knows that.

When you look at your life and you ask the question, "How do you measure the achievement of your life?" For a pastor, the crown, that is the final achievement, the final goal, for a pastor is the feedback that comes from a saved and sanctified people. I understand that. You're the crown of my joy. You are my source of blessing.

I am spiritually benefitted by what you do in my life. By the response you have to the Word of God, I

see the Word of God at work in your life. I see its impact in your marriages and your homes and your families and your outreach and your prayers and your giving. This is to me all the reward that I need. But I need that reward. There's just sheer joy in that reward.

You know, the preacher preaches, the Apostle Paul says, he's like a farmer and he does it because he gets to taste the fruit. And that you can't understand how encouraging, how energizing, how up-building, up-lifting and sanctifying that is to the shepherd of the sheep, to rejoice in the world that the Spirit of God through the Word of God is doing in the flock that is given to him. So I don't do well without this church. I never have and I'm pretty sure I never will. And I don't feel at all, even though I've been gone for a few months, I don't feel in any sense diminished. It's back to that old adage that the absence makes the heart grow fonder. We have so many rich memories, Patricia and I and all of our family and our children, that it isn't just that. This church would hold our hearts captive for the rest of our lives on the sheer power of the memories of the past.

But that's not how it is. They are there but the power of this church is in the present and from my standpoint, even in the future. I don't feel any diminished in strength, although you all obviously know because most of you have been through some kind of surgery, there's a bit of a shock of trying to recover from a major surgery in terms of your own strength. But I don't feel diminished in my strength or my desire to do what I do and for the sheer joy of it that comes because God does honor His Word and He has blessed me with this incredible, incredible congregation and amazing ministry that gives me such great joy.

Well there are a lot of things that I could say about a lot of different things that I've been thinking through these months, but I think for tonight...I don't want to try to cover a whole lot of bases. I just want to say one thing and maybe this is sufficient for now.

Next Sunday morning we're going to go back to Mark. I think I'm going to be okay. This is kind of a test run and so far I haven't fallen over. So we'll work on that basis and if I need to sit down a little bit, I'll do that.

Just to kind of protect myself, preserve my strength a little bit, I'll probably come in when I preach and do that both times without being here for the whole time so that I can kind of maximize my ability to be here in front of you for the hour at least that I'm going to be opening the Word of God. But we will start the gospel of Mark and jump back in again in a wonderful, wonderful new and fresh glimpse of the Lord Jesus Christ which we have so loved in the gospels that we've gone through.

And then on Sunday night, I told you when I left, we had talked about Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath and I said at the time that I would really love to go back and have a study on the Sabbath and the Sabbath...if it has any connection to the Lord's Day, what that connection is. I think that's an important study. So next Sunday night I am intending to launch a study of the Sabbath in its relationship to the Lord's Day. There are still people greatly confused by this. There is, of course, even in Southern California, especially a large, large contingent of people called Seventh Day Adventists who being very confused about that issue of the Sabbath as well as other things need to be helped. So that's what we want to do.

But for tonight, I really have one intention in mind and that is to thank you. I first of all want to thank Rick for his leadership, stellar leadership of the church. I need to thank him for his preaching, faithful

preaching. Phil Johnson as well who the two of them bore the brunt of most of the opportunities to preach, and all the others who did preach in my place. I'm profoundly grateful to our staff, all the people who serve and stand alongside me and cover lots of bases when I'm not around. Thanks to them as well. Thanks to you as a people for your faithfulness, for your expressions of love, for your cards and letters of encouragement, for your giving which has been absolutely...absolutely remarkable. I could tell you story after story after story of how God has worked in ways that are just beyond imagination to support the work in very, very hard times.

You know, I never ask the question, "Is God in this ministry?" It is staggering when I think about it. And I need to share just a couple of things about that.

When we came to the end of the fiscal year in June at the Master's College, we were struggling to see if we could get there to a balanced budget. And we were praying and everything we could, we were hoping to be in the black. It was going to be close whether we could even make it because that's very important for one's accreditation, the college had just received a ten-year, along with seminary, accreditation from WASC the western Association of schools and colleges, ten year accreditation is the maximum that any institution can get. We wanted to make sure we kept that in good standing and so we were concerned about our money.

In the last three weeks of June, we were praying that God would provide. One point nine to five million dollars in donations came to the college. Not only did we go way over what we needed for the budget but we pushed some of it into July to start the new fiscal year. There was really no human explanation for that. There were gifts from all different kinds of people of all different amounts and it was really a stunning act on the part of the Lord.

One wonderful story. In our church for many years is a sweet little lady. She didn't seem to have much, but everything she had she left to the Master's Seminary, Grace Church and Grace To You and this quiet little sweet lady went to heaven and all three ministries got a check for about a hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars. Well it was amazing. Just another way in which from an unsolicited, sort of unknown way, unknown source, the Lord in His magnanimous grace sent what we need to carry on the work that He's given us to do. I looked at the bulletin today and I saw the giving to the commitment to the commission, our missionaries are flourishing and the missionaries are being sent. All this at a time when there are ministries hunkering down, going out of business, Christian colleges going out of business, ministries cutting their staff in half. And I don't know how to say it other than to say I thank God for the generosity of this church and the people who are part of this church and its ministries, and that's you.

Well, I ask myself the question...how can I express my gratitude? How can I say thanks to you? And so as always, I start to think about my mentor, my mentor is the Apostle Paul, I think you know that. And I think about Paul and I ask the question...How did Paul express gratitude? What drew thanksgiving out of his heart?

Open your Bible to Philippians chapter 4...Philippians chapter 4. And I ask the question of the Apostle Paul...How did he express his gratitude? And I really, I was drawn immediately to this passage in Philippians 4:10 and obviously I don't want to dig everything in here that's possible, but I think it's a good general text to look into the heart of a grateful man. Verse 10, "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly..>I rejoiced in the Lord greatly." That's a thankful heart. "That now at last you've revived your concern for me, indeed you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity, not that I speak from

want for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means. 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. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. Nevertheless you have done well to share with me in my affliction. 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. 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, have an abundance I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice well-pleasing to God. And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever amen.”

The operative word that I want you to notice here in this text is in verse 11, it is the word “content...content...content.” I've learned to be content. Contentment is a rich word. It means to be satisfied. It means to have enough. It means to want nothing more. For example, in Luke 3:14, “Be content with your wages.” Paul said in 1 Timothy 6:6, “Godliness with contentment is great gain.” And in verse 8, “Having food and clothing, let us be content.” The writer of Hebrews puts it this way in chapter 13 verse 5, “Be content with what you have for He said, I will never leave you or forsake you.”

Contentment is a spiritual virtue. Contentment is something that should be true of every child of God and certainly is of the spiritual Christian. Another way to understand contentment is to see it as that which is the attitude of a fully satisfied person.

As Paul concludes his letter to the Philippians, he concludes with a desire to express himself from the heart about how much he loves them. He starts chapter 4 by saying, “My beloved brethren, whom I long.” It says in italics, “to see,” but really it is “for whom I long.” I understand that. “My joy and crown,” that's how he identifies them. There's a lot of empathy, sympathy, compassion, affection in that introduction to chapter 4. They are beloved to him. He longs to be with them. They are his source of joy. They are his reward.

And as he closes the letter, he wants to express his gratitude and he does it by identifying for them the fact that he is totally satisfied, totally content. I identify with that when I think about Grace Church and I think about all that the Lord has brought to my life and to Patricia's life and to the life of our family for all these many, many years. The word that always comes to my mind is content. I ask for nothing more, desire nothing more. There is no lack of satisfaction.

This whole text that I read to you is intended as a final thanks to the church he loved for the fact that they had brought to him contentment. Now remember, it's a remarkable situation he finds himself in. He's in a prison at the time he writes. The prison is in Rome. He is chained to a Roman soldier. He is kept in some isolation in the small quarters. He's unable to move about. He's away from the people he loves. He has no capacity openly to minister, to work, to preach. As far as human provisions are concerned, he has nothing but what is minimal. He has the basics of life. He is afflicted by being a prisoner, by being a captive and living in the minimalist sense. In some ways this is the lowest point of his life in terms of his physical situation...chained to a Roman soldier, able to touch only a few friends who could get to him, anticipating his trial before Nero and perhaps his execution. He is deprived of every comfort. He is cast as a lonely man on the shores of the great strange metropolis

of Rome. With every movement of his hand there is a clanking of his fetters. There's nothing before him but the lion's mouth or the soldier's sword.

And yet, he is grateful. And he ends this letter from that situation with an expression of gratitude. And what brings him gratitude is the fact that his heart is so satisfied...so satisfied. He is content. Back to verse 11, "I have learned to be content." There can't be any greater thing than that in anybody's life, not in mine or your's, to be content. I think all of us would long to have that, all of us can have that, all of us should have that. The word "content" means to be self-sufficient, to have enough, to desire nothing more. That was true of the Apostle Paul.

Back to verse 12 for a moment. He says something that is quite interesting in the context, down toward the end of verse 12, he says, "I've learned the secret...I've learned the secret."

There's a secret to being content. This verb actually means in the Greek to be initiated and it's perhaps good to kind of do a little study on this word. It was used of initiation into the mystery religions, *mueois* the verb. When people were introduced into the mystery religions which were a plethora of satanic kinds of cults, their initiation was supposedly some introduction into the secrets. Well Paul is saying, "I've been initiated. I've been initiated into the secrets of contentment. I've had my initiation." For all of those cults, and all those false religions, all those mystery religions there were rites of initiation. Vestiges of that exist today with the Masons and other forms of social relationship which are connected with ancient religion. Paul says, "I have been initiated into the religion of contentment."

He talks about...verse 7...the peace of God surpassing all comprehension, guarding your hearts and your minds in Christ. In verse 9 he talks about the God of peace being with him. In verse 6 he says he is anxious for nothing. This is a man who is content. This is a man who knows peace. This is a man who has been initiated into contentment, satisfied, lacking nothing.

I really do identify with that. I'm not...well I'm irritated by this knee, I'm not discouraged by it as if it is some kind of intrusion into my life that would invade and somehow diminish my contentment. It's an irritation because I want to move much faster than it is willing to move. But I will tell you this, I do understand what it means to be content, to be satisfied, to have everything that you could ever ask for and more. I have by the grace of God, the goodness of God, due to nothing of my own, been inaugurated into the secret of contentment. I have...the Lord has put me in the most favorable circumstances that any minister could ever be in. And there is great contentment in that.

Now let's look with Paul for a minute a little deeper into this. What were the components of contentment. I'll just give you a few things to think about. First of all, confidence in God's providence...confidence in God's providence. Verse 10, "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."

For ten years the Philippian church had been unable to send support to Paul...ten years. They loved him. He loved them. For ten years they couldn't send him anything. It was ten years since God brought Paul to Philippi to start a church. You remember that, don't you? Acts 16, he came to Philippi, preached the gospel, got thrown in jail, was delivered out of jail in an earthquake. The jailer and his family were converted. The church was planted. But for ten years since that time, they had

not supported him. But in verse 10 he says, "You lacked, *kairos*," translated opportunity. You lacked the season. There was no way that it could be done. Perhaps partly Paul's inaccessibility to them, perhaps their own poverty which was great. Remember now, Philippi is in Macedonia and if you remember 2 Corinthians, it was the churches of Macedonia who when they did give demonstrated their great love out of deep poverty. "But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly because finally when you had opportunity, Epaphroditus arrives in Rome with the gifts from the Philippians, now at last you've revived your concern for me."

He doesn't blame them. He says, "You were concerned before," and they were. When the ten years ago he had left, they had given him something to send him on his way and in the intervening time they had not been able to do that. This demonstrates, I think, the Apostle's patient confidence in God's sovereign provision. He was so sure that God in due time would order the circumstances so that his needs would be met. All through those ten years, somebody else met his need and when it came to this particular juncture in his life, when he was in jail in Rome, and there was not another to meet his need, the providence of God ordered the Philippians to find the resources exactly on schedule and to have them delivered to the beloved Apostle.

There's no panic in his life. There's no manipulation in his life because he has confidence in the providential control of God, that God orders all the circumstances, all the contingencies, all the diverse factors of life to produce His perfect will. He's always done it.

You go to the Old Testament, you see it in the story of Joseph, you see it in the story of Esther, you see it in the story of Ruth...many, many other places. Paul patiently lived his life confident that his needs would be met because of the divine providence of God. It takes the panic out of life. He was content because he knew his God was in total control of everything, fully confident that God would order all the events, all the contingencies to meet his needs.

Secondly, he was content because not only he trusted in the providence of God, but he was satisfied with little. Verse 11, "Not that I speak from want. I've learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am."

You know, essentially what he's saying is, "I don't have any needs. I don't want anything more than what I have." This is quite contrary to the attitude of most people in the world today. It's an attitude, I think, that is tragically moved into the church with a vengeance. One of the most painful experiences of not being in church on Sunday when you're recovering from surgery is you have to watch some preachers on TV. You know, I'd almost rather have a root canal without anesthesia... I mean, it's an absolutely excruciating experience for me, to watch these health-wealth-prosperity preachers feed peoples discontent and tell them that if they're sick, they're poor, if they're struggling, if their dreams aren't fulfilled, their desires aren't fulfilled, everything they want hasn't been delivered to them, somehow they need to go to God and He's just waiting to give them everything they want, everything they desire. That is just so counter-productive, destructive, devastating. We already live in a culture that is consumed with its own needs and its own desires and its own wants.

Paul is essentially saying, "I don't want anything." I understand that. I understand that. I have way more than I need, way more. All the things that make me content, God has deposited in my life. And I'll tell you very simply, they all relate to people, to have the gift of God in my wife Patricia, in my children, my grandchildren, in people I work with, my friends, my church, this is my contentment...to have the opportunity to proclaim the Word of God, to preach and teach the Scripture, to see the fruit

of the Spirit manifest in the people in whom the Word does its powerful work is enough. I know that the Lord says, "If you seek the Kingdom, everything else will be added to you. Take no thought for what you eat or drink and all these kinds of things." It's up to the Lord to give whatever He wants to give at that point. Those things have nothing to do with spiritual contentment. And if you're looking for spiritual contentment in those areas, you're never going to find it there.

Paul is in a far-more deprived situation than I've ever been in. And he says, "I don't have any needs. I'm not speaking from want, I want nothing." That's another way to say that. "I'm not asking for anything. I've learned through the crucible of trials and difficult circumstances and experience, I've learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am." He's content with little. He finds his satisfaction and his fulfillment in the right things.

Now I need to say as a footnote, he's not content in the sense that he thinks he can pull back on the preaching of the gospel. He's not content that enough people have been converted to Christ. He's not content that he's fulfilled the great commission. He's not content that the church is as holy as it should be. He's not content on the spiritual side even with his own life because he sees himself as a wretched man. He's not content in that sense. But when it comes to the provisions of life, he is content...so far from the needs-oriented culture in which we live where everybody is chasing every imaginable things they want. And some preachers come along and they say, "This is a godly kind of thing. This is what God wants. He wants you to have everything you want." That's a lie.

Paul is satisfied with little. He is satisfied with the basics. He is content with whatever God gives him materially because that's not where he finds his contentment any way.

There's a third element that comes into the fabric of contentment. It's parallel to the one that I just gave you. He...the contented person is independent from circumstances...that's what he says essentially in the verse I just read, "In whatever circumstances I am," then he sort of spells it out, "I know how to get along with humble means. I also know how to live in prosperity in any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of being filled, going hungry, having abundance, suffering need," which is another way of saying whether I have a lot or a little, it really is immaterial. In every circumstance...and then he spins that out to mean extreme deprivation, extreme abundance, they don't really matter...whether it's humble means, referring to the needs of daily life, just basic food, clothing, a place to rest, or whether it's prosperity meaning overflowing, abounding, having far more of these material things than are necessary. In any circumstance, he says again back to the initiation idea, I have been initiated into contentment.

There's some interesting words that he uses here. He says, "I have learned the secret of being filled...being filled." A verb, *chortazo*, which was used of feeding and fattening up animals, of having an abundance, *perisseuo*, used again meaning satisfied in fullest measure. On the other hand, suffering need, going hungry. And you can do the study yourself, 2 Corinthians, where Paul lists all the deprivations, all of the things which were so difficult for him and the rest of his ministry in the epistles that he writes, he does talk from time to time about his abundance.

Well enough said about that for the sake of time. If you're going to enjoy contentment, you start with being confident in God's providence. That is, you don't have to panic whatever condition you're in because God is going to move the circumstances of life to meet your needs. Secondly, to be satisfied with little and have no wants beyond what is necessary. And, thirdly, to live independent of circumstances.

A fourth element of contentment is to understand the promise of divine power. Verse 13, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." Isaiah 40:31 says, "To him who has no might, He increases strength." I love that passage that says, you know...2 Corinthians 12...where Paul in verses 7 to 10 talks about the thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan sent to buffet him and how tortured he was. He implores the Lord three times to remove it and the Lord says to him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness...power is perfected in weakness." The truly powerful Christian is the one who has come to the end of all human resources, then the power of God is released. "Most gladly, therefore, I'd rather boast about my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may dwell in me." Paul wanted to come across as weak, and he did. People said he was weak and unimpressive, that was okay with him because there was then no human explanation for his life.

I remember having a conversation with Deepak Chopra one night in between segments of Larry King program and Deepak can barely tolerate me. He views me...he views me as...with disdain and I try to be as gracious as I can to him and not, you know, when you differ on theology and truth, that's unavoidable, but try to be as kind in doing so as I can. But he was saying to the panel something about a certain philosophical issue. And then he said, "Of course, you wouldn't have any comprehension of that," to me. And I replied by saying, "Well, I actually think I do have a comprehension of that. In fact, let me explain that I know exactly what you're talking about." And I basically gave him back a philosophical explanation of what he was saying and I said, "In fact, I have a book that I have written that deals with that." To which he responded, "I wouldn't read anything you wrote."

Fine. It was going to be free. You know, that's a sad thing...that's a sad thing, but from his viewpoint, whatever impact I have, I'm not the explanation for. You understand that? You can never explain the impact of John MacArthur by John MacArthur. And that's what Paul was saying. I'm not the explanation of what God has done for me. I've been sustained by divine power and I can do all things, that is all things related to what God wants me to do, all things related to my calling, all things related to my ministry, all things necessary to fulfill my responsibility through strength that is beyond myself. The verb, "Him who strengthens me," *endunamoo*, a compound of the word dynamite, to infuse strength into. The Spirit is our strength. Paul says simply the same thing in Galatians 2:20, "I'm crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me and the life which I live, I live in that power."

When you are initiated into the realm of contentment, it is because you are confident in divine providence, satisfied with little, live independent of circumstances and put complete confidence in divine power.

There's just two more things that I would suggest to you and we could get a little bogged down, so I'll just give you an overview real quick. Contentment is also related to being preoccupied with the well-being of others...preoccupied with the well-being of others. No one is more uninteresting than somebody who is consumed with himself, true? Really, I don't care to spend two minutes with people like that and no one is more welcoming and inviting and enjoyable than someone who is consumed with the needs of others. Those are the kinds of people you want to be with.

I love this in Paul. Verse 14 he says this, "You've done well to share with me in my affliction, I'm so glad you did that. 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.” I get the picture, ten years ago he leaves Philippi, he says here, “Hey, in the midst of my affliction, my tribulation, *thlipsis*, you've done well. You...when I departed from Macedonia, were the only church that gave me any kind of help.” He left Philippi, went on to Thessalonica and he was not there very long, it was there very brief time, only a matter of weeks, and they trailed after him. And it says, “Even in Thessalonica where he went after he left Philippi, you sent a gift more than once.” They were really taking care of him. They sent him away with gifts and for the few weeks or perhaps at the most just a few months that he was in Thessalonica, they followed up and sent him more gifts. They are the brothers, I think, from Macedonia who supplied my need, as he describes it in 2 Corinthians 11:8 and 9 and did it out of their deep poverty. You're the only church that did it. And then for ten years I didn't hear from you, but that was because God was using others and you had no opportunity.

Then verse 17 explains why he's so grateful for their gift. “Not that I seek the gift itself,” it isn't that, “but I seek for the profit that increases to your account.” So unselfish. He was unlike a lot of evangelists today who want your money for themselves. If it impoverishes you, if it's destructive to you, they could care less. They'll send you their little miracle bottle of water, their little miracle cloth. They'll take every dime out of your pocket. They'll leave you destitute, happily march to the bank to deposit what you gave.

Paul says, “I don't seek the gift, I seek the profit which increases to your account.” This is a kind of a simple concept, *karpon*, the fruit, the benefit, the profit that goes into your spiritual account. What's he talking about? Treasure in heaven. He says, “What makes me so content is that when you give, you're rewarded in heaven. You lay up treasure in heaven. I don't want you to give because I need it, I want you to give because you'll be rewarded.

When I look and see the giving of people in this church, my joy is not, “O great, you know, all the programs we're trying to invent, you know, we're going to be able to do those.” I'm grateful for the support, obviously for the work that goes on, but I'm most grateful for the benefit that accrues to your spiritual account.

Sow sparingly, reap sparingly...sow bountifully, reap bountifully...Luke 6:38, “Give and it shall be given unto you, pressed down, shaken together, running over.” Nothing makes the heart of the pastor more glad than to know that his people give sacrificially so that they will be blessed abundantly. This is the evidence of a truly spiritual man. He is concerned only with the spiritual reward of those he loves. He says it, “I have received everything in full, I have an abundance, I am amply supplied having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent.”

Then he uses sacrificial language from the Old Testament, “A fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice well pleasing to God.” He says, “Look, I received the gift, I already have everything that I need. I'm already full, I'm already the recipient of an abundance. But what you have sent is before God, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to Him and for that you will be blessed.”

And here's how, verse 19. “And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” Paul had more than enough. I have more than enough...way more than enough. Every time another gift comes, I thank the Lord for the generosity of the giver because I know that generosity is an expression of love that is treasure laid up in heaven.

Well, I will tell you that God has initiated me, inaugurated me, brought me into the secret of contentment and, of course, I am most content when I'm here in this place with you. I am content with the wife God has given me, completely content, fully satisfied with the family He's given me, but particularly that He has placed us all together in this remarkable ministry and together for all these 40 years the Lord has supplied our needs to His glory. And we can all say, can't we, in verse 20, "To our God and Father be the glory forever and ever."

Father, we thank You for Your truth, we thank You for Your Word. Thank You that not only is full of sections on doctrines and sections on history and accounts of the Savior but scattered throughout Scripture are these immensely practical portions which help us to deal with the attitudes of our heart that are so important to living life with blessing and fulfillment. You satisfy us fully. What could we be but content? How could we be less than content, knowing that we have what You have given us? We know, Lord, our contentment will be severely interrupted by sin, disobedience, carnality, selfishness. But, Lord, as long as we walk in the Spirit and obey the truth, we will be initiated into the secret of contentment.

We're not humanists. To the humanist, he's alone in the universe, no one to help. Make it on your own, or you're not going to make it. We're not humanists, we're theists, we're not alone...we're not alone. You live and You are not only the God of the universe, You are our God and our Father through the gospel of Jesus Christ and You promise to care for everything we need and to bless us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies and to give us bread for our food and to never leave us or forsake us. So we live under that massive promise, content that You will supply all our needs according to Your riches in glory by means of Christ Jesus, We thank You for that in His wonderful name. Amen. Amen.

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