

Contentment

As I was picturing in my mind, what it means to be content. [PICTURE 1] The first thought was seeing a baby, wrapped snugly in a blanket and cap, held in the arms of its mother. [PICTURE 2] Then, I pictured in my mind a small child, held tightly in the strong arms of the father. And, [PICTURE 3] then I pictured a grandfather or grandmother sitting on a chair reading a book to their grandchildren.

How do you picture contentment?

In our text, we heard Paul say in Phil. 4:12, **I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty.**

Most of us, who have been married for a long time, can relate to the struggles of those first several years of marriage. You are young, have all these bills, you go through a lot of relationship adjustments, you struggle to get ahead, living pay check to pay check. I remember when Sue and I were trying to find a place to live that we can afford. I think it was around November of 1975. We managed to find this cute 450 square foot cottage on Paw Paw Lake in Coloma, Michigan. Since it was a cottage, it did not have a heater. December was very cold. But by January, Sue's grandfather was so fragile after an illness, he had to live with her parents until he was stronger. So, he wanted us to stay in his warm house until Spring — rent free. The only condition was made — that we pay the utilities and keep the house clean. Those first three years of marriage were tough. But the Lord provided for us in need and we had just enough to get by. The most important is that we had Jesus, His forgiveness and His ever-presence. I am sure many of you have some stories to tell.

As I look over the last 35 years of our marriage, I can relate well to what the Apostle Paul said in our text. **I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty.** But I can honestly tell you, I still struggle at times, even today, **to be content whatever the circumstances.** How about you? Are you content in life?

So many things come up in our lives that effect our families, finances, health, jobs, relationships and the like. What about spiritually? [Picture 4] True godly contentment is Jesus Christ and living with His ever-presence in our lives. Paul tells us in 1 Tim. 6:6 **But godliness with contentment is great gain....** Paul describes what godly contentment is. It is having sufficiency in Christ Jesus, who provides all the strength you need to get you through any and every situation in life.

This is a quality of life, godliness with contentment, is given by God, which cannot

be disrupted by wickedness, temptations or troubles. In verse 8, Paul says, **But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.** This, of course, includes having a roof over your head. But all too often, many people are not satisfied with that. They want more. Paul goes on to say in 1 Tim. 6:9-10 **People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.**

Recently, I learned that the vote to have Hoosier Lotto in Indiana was approved on November 8, 1988. Since that time, there have only been 91 people who have won the jackpot prize. I met a person who has played the lotto for almost twenty years, spending \$5 a week. To date they have yet to win a thing. In twenty years time, they have lost over \$5,200.00. Nationwide statistics reveals that 90% of the people, who have won the big bucks in state lotteries, have gone bankrupt within just two years.

Another problem our society has is that the average American carries around two to seven credit cards. Their average total debt on those cards is \$10,000.00. This is supposed to be living a life of contentment.

Not only do many people find contentment in possessions, they believe in being self-reliant and self-serving. They are only interested in themselves, and boast about what they got. People forget, so quickly, what the Apostle Paul said in 1 Tim. 6:7 **For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.** So, if you are trying to find contentment in possessions, or trying to live your life by your own accomplishments and self-reliance, that road leads to a dead end both physically and spiritually.

Did you know that there is a danger of having just enough or having plenty in our lives. What danger is that? It is when life is going so smoothly and so well. Your own inner strength is building up. But, somehow, you cross that line where you forget about thanksgiving to God. We begin to take Him for granted. We start taking the credit for your accomplishments. Your contentment is based upon what we have done. This kind of thing shows up in our prayer life. You know. Things are going along so well, but you are so tired or so busy that you don't see the need to pray to God as much. But boy, as soon as things start getting tough and difficult – like suffering, loss, or weaknesses, suddenly your prayer life to God increases.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE CONTENT? The biblical understanding is this:

- 1) To be secure in God's love and forgiveness in Christ Jesus.
- 2) To have just enough — enough to give to and minister to others.

- 3) To know that aid and support is still needed from God.
- 4) To be in Christ who strengthens you.
- 5) To trust and confide in the heavenly Father.
- 6) To banish all anxiety about the future, because the future is provided by God.
- 7) To be thankful.

In our text, Paul said, in Phil. 4:11b-12b **...for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances....I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.**

From this text, we learn that being content is a virtue that one must learn. What are we to learn? We are to learn to trust God in every situation – no matter how great or how small the situation is. Learning to be content is not something that most of us are natural at doing.

Paul does not make any distinctions between the necessary things in life and the nonessential things. Just give thanks for everything. Earlier in our text, Paul said, in verse 6, **Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.** We need to accept the fact that life here on earth is not fair. Throughout life, there will be times that you will either be in need, have enough or have plenty. All of these experiences are gifts from God together with His forgiveness and ever-present power. Therefore, **GODLY** content means to be thankful.

What can we be content in and thankful for when we are sick, have an illness or in pain? In 2 Cor. 12, Paul describes this thorn in his flesh filled with pain and torment. He says, **Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But God said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.** The Scriptures reveal to us that these things serve as a repeated reminder that we are utterly dependent on all that God is and does — **HIS GRACE IS SUFFICIENT.**

How about when a person is facing death? Where can you find contentment? Phil. 1:20-21, Paul said, **I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. YOUR CONTENTMENT IS IN THE LIFE FOUND IN CHRIST JESUS!**

HERE IS A QUESTION FOR ALL OF US TO PONDER: How content DOES God want us to be? Content enough to be in need of Him – to have just enough, enough to care for others. To be content is to trust God in every situation in life. He is all the confidence that we need. We can say with Paul, in Phil. 4:13, **I can do everything through him who gives me strength.** Our strength for EVERYTHING lies in the One who continually empowers us — Jesus Christ. Remember this — to be content is to be thankful. As it reads in 1 Tim. 1:12 **I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.**

We, in Christ Jesus, have the promise that He will never leave us nor forsake us. For we are told in Heb. 13 **Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”**

SO, WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE TRULY CONTENT? The answer is in Christ Jesus. 2 Cor. 9:8 **And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.** CONTENT MEANS BEING FAITHFUL TO GOD.

Jesus showed us how to be content. He said, **“Father, not my will but Your will be done.”** On the cross, He said, **“Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do.”** And at the moment of death, Jesus said, **“Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit.”** After His resurrection, Jesus said, **“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”**

You and I can have contentment in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For under the Gospel, the mark of being content is having been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, Jesus. Being content is having His forgiveness and His ever-presence with us. GREAT IS HIS FAITHFULNESS. Being content is the freedom to give to others, as Christ Jesus gave His life for us. You no longer live for yourself. You live for Christ’s sake. And with thanksgiving live with Him for all eternity.