

Contentment in Life (Philippians 4:10-23)

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A man walked into a mental institution one day and was taken on a tour. The tour saw one cell where the man was beating his head against the padded walls. He kept saying, "Linda, how could you do it? Linda, how could you do it?" The guide explained that the man was in love with Linda, and when Linda decided to marry another man instead of him, he drifted off into the ozone. He couldn't handle it. They went to the next cell, and there was a man saying, "Linda, Linda, how could this happen? Linda, Linda." The visitor said, "Who's he?" The guide said, "He's the man who married Linda!"

This illustrates to us that the grass is not always greener on the other side! It also teaches us an important lesson. Many times we are not content with where we are at in life and the circumstances that God allows to come into our lives. As a result, we can end up in the spiritual mental ward, if we are not content with what life brings our way. Many Christians are unfortunately always wishing for more, for more expensive cars and vacations, for that lottery ticket that might give them a big jackpot. They also are looking for better and more favorable circumstances. They think that life has sent them a lemon when things are not going according to their plans and schedules. The fact is this. Some Christians are never really satisfied with what life brings their way and with God's sovereign purpose for their daily lives.

Romans 8:28

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Many Christians have forgotten that God has a purpose for every phase and change that comes into their lives. It's our responsibility to walk by faith and experience contentment with God's sovereign purpose for our lives. In this age of consumerism Christians often find themselves living for bigger

and better things. However, in the end they discover that things never really do satisfy them, even after they acquire them.

When I was younger, I remember buying a used car with flip-up lights. I could turn a switch in the car and the headlights would pop up. I thought this was the greatest thing. I recall driving down the road flipping up those lights and thinking that I have purchased something that I will always be satisfied with. However, a year down the road the newness of the car wore off, and it became just like every other car that I had purchased. It was just another car for transportation. The point is this. When we look to find contentment in things, we will always come up short. This is because material things never can bring true and lasting contentment into our lives. This is because true contentment is not based upon material things but on an inner satisfaction that comes from God.

Many Christians are beating their heads against the wall and are really crying out, "Lord, I am not satisfied or content with what I have. Give me something else to satisfy me." Or we might say because of unfavorable circumstances, "God, I can't take this anymore. I need some change in my life, and if you don't mind, I would like it right now!" But in the midst of this mental war, which is going on within us, there is a still small voice that is crying out to our soul and saying: "Be content with what you have in life and find contentment in every stage and change of life."

What is contentment anyway? Contentment is a spiritual state of satisfaction we can possess in our minds and hearts in spite of what we lack or what we are experiencing in life. Contentment is when we possess an inner satisfaction of heart during the changing circumstances or our lives which might include financial, health, job, and relationship changes. Our surroundings and circumstances might change but during these changes we can possess an inner satisfaction that comes from facing life in will of God and accepting His overall purpose for our lives. We need a peaceful ease of mind and heart as our life sometimes begins to spin in a different direction.

Someone said:

"All the world lives in two tents - content and discontent."

Which tent are you living in these days? Now let's get to the heart of our study. The passage before us addresses the subject of contentment. Here is our main point. God wants us to experience contentment in life. The Bible teaches there is a four-fold way to experience true contentment in life.

1. By rejoicing in our relationship with God

Philippians 4:10 -11

"But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, *therewith* to be content."

This rejoicing (vs. 10) preceded his contentment (vs. 11) and was an inseparable part of why Paul could experience contentment and inner peace within his heart. Paul says, "But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly" (vs. 10). This means Paul was rejoicing in his relationship and walk with God. Earlier Paul alluded to the fact that he was rejoicing in the Lord and not his surrounding circumstances.

Philippians 4:4

"Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice."

It's not what we have that is important. It's where we are rejoicing! The secret of inner contentment or satisfaction is this. It's found only in the Lord. It's learning to practice the presence of God in your life, where you can throw your arms around God and say, "Lord, I am rejoicing in your wonderful love and fellowship today. I am rejoicing in what you are doing for my life. I am thrilled with Your life and will lose myself in Your presence."

You see, when life does not seem fair to us, when life serves us a sour lemon, it's then we can learn to rejoice in the Lord despite our trying circumstances. This is because we have a relationship with the Lord that is far more important than our outward changing circumstances. We can rejoice in the Lord knowing that He loves us and cares for and will meet our every need. We can enjoy wonderful fellowship with God in spite of the

changing circumstances we face. We must understand that inner contentment is only found when we have a strong relationship with God. It is not found in a bank account that is full of money. It is not found through drinking alcoholic beverage, taking drugs, compromising to keep friends, or in conformity to the world (Rom. 12:2). Contentment is only found in the Lord. You cannot find contentment without this relationship with the Lord.

In this instance, Paul rejoiced in the Lord for the financial gift that the Philippian believers had sent him (vs. 10). He found that this financial gift was something that he could rejoice about in the Lord. God had meant his need through the financial assistance of these Christian people. The word “care” in Philippians 4:10 literally means to exercise the mind and points to the fact that these Christians were thinking of him. The axiom which says, “Out of sight - out of mind” was not true with these believers. They were constantly thinking about Paul and praying for him. And may I say that every preacher needs people like this today. He needs those who are praying on his behalf for wisdom in the ministry and in his study.

In this case, the people were constantly thinking about Paul’s financial need as a preacher of the Gospel, and they wanted to meet this need. The preacher also needs people like this today as well. Any preacher who is not a loafer in the ministry is worthy of the help of the people (Luke 10:7). He is not to be looked upon as a man who needs to be humbled by keeping him in the poor house. Some churches think that the poorer the preacher is the humbler he will be.

The care of these Christians for Paul was said to have “flourished” again (vs. 10) which is a word used of trees and flowers, which have sprouted, shot up or blossomed again, after the long dormant winter. In essence, the people wanted to meet the need of Paul once again. The believers were “careful” or constantly thinking of a way to get some relief money to Paul.

The Philippians wanted to give to Paul but they “lacked opportunity” to do so not knowing how they could get the money to Paul. Not until they sent Epaphroditus could they send the money to Paul and meet his need (see vs. 18). The principle is this. When we feel the need to do something for the Lord, then God will find a way for us to do it, if indeed, it’s His will.

Opportunity will turn into reality. Once again we see how important and Biblical it is to support God's man in the ministry of the church. Meeting the need of God's servant is a necessary part of church function and life (1 Tim 5:17).

Paul "rejoiced in the Lord" (vs. 10) because of what the saints had done for him. He found great joy in the person of the Lord as he encountered His intimate fellowship and multitudes of spiritual blessings. The question is this. Have you been rejoicing in who God is and what He has been doing in your life? Are you experiencing that wonderful relationship and communion that you can have with the Lord? We need to take time with the Lord and experience a growing and dynamic relationship with Him if we are ever going to be content in life.

Dr. Andrew Bonar, a saintly man, wrote in his diary: "Tonight I gave myself to a time of waiting upon the Lord. I had not been much in the spirit of prayer, but now several things have become clear to me. I realize I have not communed enough with the Lord, nor come to Him as often as I should. Little forethought has been given to the requests I've made. There has been much conversing and outward engagement with men, but I have not been occupied enough with God himself. I also realize that a closeness to Him gives abundant strength and is like sunlight shining through the clouds on a gloomy day."

2. By resting in the providence God

Philippians 4:11-12

"Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."

A wealthy employer once heard one of his workers exclaim, "Oh, if I only had a hundred dollars, I would be perfectly content." Knowing that his own money had not given him this inner peace, he told her, "Since I would like to see someone who is perfectly contented, I'm going to grant your desire." He gave her the money and left, but before he was out of earshot, he heard

her remark almost bitterly, "Why on earth didn't I say \$200?" The boss smiled, for he had made his point that money can never make a person "perfectly contented."

To live a contented life ("to be content" - vs. 11) is a great blessing from God. God has promised to bless our lives with contentment. Instead of striving for greater riches and more favorable circumstances, we can accept the changes that come our way financially or physically and be content in the will of God for our lives. Paul found contentment by resting in the providence of God over his life. He "learned" (vs. 11) experientially through the ups and downs of life ("whatsoever state") that God was somehow in control. Life's changes were not based upon luck and blind chance but upon God's unfailing plan and purpose for his life. This is why Paul could face the changing seasons of his life with inner contentment.

Providence speaks of the working of God in advance to arrange circumstances and situations for the fulfilling of His purposes. Paul recognized that God was working in his life and arranging his life according to His sovereign plan. Everything that he encountered in life, both good and bad, went through the providential acts of God. Understanding God's providence will bring us to the place where we will say: "True, this is my situation at the moment. I'll look unblinkingly at the reality of it. But I'll also open my hands to accept willingly whatever a loving Father sends."

This is what Paul realized as he begins to talk about the contented life. In verse eleven Paul uses the word "want" which means to lack something or fall short. In other words, he does not want the people to think that he is complaining about any shortage of funds in connection with the gift that they sent to him. He was not in want. He was simply talking about how he learned contentment in times when he had no money. Paul learned to be satisfied with whatever the providence of God sent his way!

Someone has said:

"Contentment is understanding that if I am not satisfied with what I have, I will never be satisfied with what I want."

Paul did have a true financial need. But Paul did not beg God's people to help him in his work. He just placed the need before them and trusted the providential workings of God to meet it. And he wanted them to know that what they sent to him was a blessing no matter what the dollar amount was. You say, but what if they did not send exactly what he needed for a Holiday Inn Motel or a new Chevy car? My friend, it did not matter to Paul. He was grateful for what the people did send to him. Furthermore, Paul uses this matter of money to bring in the teaching of contentment. He said, I'm not complaining what you sent to me because I have discovered something in life. I have discovered that I can have inner contentment in whatever state I face in life – rich or poor, healthy or unhealthy. It does not matter how much money I have or how little I have. It does not matter how my health is doing because I have found a secret Paul says – the secret of contentment!

When it comes to money, the rich worry about losing it, and the poor worry about getting it. One of the major causes of anxiety is money and having enough money (whatever that is) will never make you content in life.

Philippians 4:10

“Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”

Paul says that we need to learn this in life. Contentment is something that we must learn over a period of time and testing. We must pass through the trials and tribulations of life to discover this inner conviction and blessed quietness. Paul had to go through many difficult experiences of life in order to learn how to be content. You can't buy contentment in a bottle and put it on your face like after-shave lotion. It's not found in anything that you can buy. You must learn the secret of contentment by experience. But we must realize that contentment is not found in money or material gain.

I remember a football star saying that he could finally experience financial security or contentment in life since he was given such a large contract of money. I think it was a five-year contract for one zillion dollars! Now listen, if you are looking for inner contentment or satisfaction through a dollar

amount, then you are going to be shaken in life. Inner satisfaction does not come from money. It never has and it never will.

In a cemetery in England stands a grave marker with this inscription: SHE DIED FOR WANT OF THINGS. Alongside that stone is another which reads: HE DIED TRYING TO GIVE THEM TO HER. In a laughable and yet tragic manner these epitaphs suggest the folly of living and working only for this world's goods. These things never bring satisfaction and contentment in life.

Paul talked about possessing contentment in whatever "state" (vs. 10) or condition that he was facing in life. Michigan is known as the "Water Winter Wonderland." Those who live here enjoy its beautiful lakes and streams, its refreshing springtime and color-splashed autumn. In spite of all the advantages and attractions of our woods and waters, some people have a tendency around February and March (especially after a severe winter) to air an occasional gripe. A standing joke around these parts when battling a blizzard or digging out of a heavy snowfall goes something like this: "I wonder, if the apostle Paul had lived in Michigan, could he have written, 'I have learned, in whatever state I am, in this to be content'--even in the state of Michigan?"

What kind of state are you in today? What are you facing in life? Is your bank account empty? Is your health failing? Is your life spinning in circles? Paul says, I have found a secret and the secret is this. No matter what state I face in life, I can experience inner contentment and satisfaction of heart. I can have this inner satisfaction knowing that whatever I am facing in life is from God and the events associated with my life are moving according to His plan and will.

How your health is doing will not make you content in life. How your job is going will not make you content in life. How your car is running will not make you content in life. How much money you have in the bank will not make you content in life. Do you know why? It's because contentment is not based on materialism, money, health, cars, or any outward circumstances. It's based upon faith in God (Mark. 11:22), knowing that the providence of the Lord is working in our lives, that God is always good (Ps.

34:8), and as our Shepherd He is always in charge of the events of our lives (Ps. 23:1).

"What tho the way be lonely, and dark the shadows fall,
I know wher'er it leadeth, My Father planned it all.
There may be sunshine tomorrow, Shadows may break and flee,
Twill be the way He chooses, My Father's plan for me.
He guides my fal'tring footsteps, A--long the weary way;
For well he knows the pathway, Will lead to endless day.
A day of light and gladness, On which no shade will fall;
Tis this at last awaits me , My Father planned it all.
I sing thru the shade and the sunshine, I'll trust Him whatever befall;
I sing for I cannot be silent, My Father planned it all."

Philippians 4:11 again states:

"I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."

Paul was confident that he was in the will of God living his life under the providence of God. He knew that wherever he was, or in whatever circumstances he found himself, he was there by divine appointment. If he was hungry, it was because God wanted him to be hungry. If he was full, it was because his Lord had so planned it. As Paul busily and faithfully engaged in the service of his King, he could say with confidence as Jesus said, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight" (Matt. 11:26). Life is not a series of accidents; it is a series of appointments!

The providence of God is the source of our contentment. Paul discovered this early on in his Christian life. God's providence means that His hand is ruling and overruling in the affairs of our lives. In this day of manmade machinery and high-tech accomplishments we have forgotten about the providence of God! We have forgotten that God interrupts the machinery of man and stops the wheels of man's machinery from spinning, so that events can move in the direction that He sees fit for our lives.

Joseph said:

“But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good” (Gen. 50:20).

This is the providence of God. It is God working out His plan for our lives in spite of the seemingly bad situations that we face. Paul realized that faith in the providence of God’s workings caused him to find inner contentment and satisfaction of heart in spite of all the changes that he had to face in life.

“I know both how to be abased” (vs. 11). Paul uses the word “abased” which means to be brought low or humbled in the money department and points to our times of need. We all know about financial pressure and reverses! It’s that time in life when we say that we are living on love because that’s all that we have to live on. Some of you older folks remember those days. And some of you younger folks wish you could forget these days. The next word “abound” speaks of having excess in the money department and points to times of prosperity.

It was the custom of Dr. Harry Ironside to go every year to Grand Rapids Michigan for a Bible conference at Mel Trotter’s mission. Mel Trotter had been an alcoholic, and after he had come to Christ, he opened a mission to reach other men who were in his former condition. The owner of a hotel which had just been built in Grand Rapids had been an alcoholic and had been led to Christ by Mel Trotter. He told Mel, “When you have a speaker or visitor come to your mission, you send him over to the hotel. We will keep him here free of charge.”

When Dr. Ironside arrived at that hotel, the man ushered him up to the presidential suite. He had the best apartment in the hotel. Dr. Ironside had never been in a place like that before. He called Mel on the phone and said, “Listen, Mel, you don’t have to put me up like this. I don’t need all this luxury. All I want is a room with a comfortable bed, and a desk and a lamp where I can study.” Mel assured him that the room was not costing him or the mission anything; it was being provided free of charge. He said, “Harry, Paul said he knew how to abound and he knew how to be abased. Now you learn to abound this week, will you?”

Most of us have learned how to “be abased” (vs. 11) because when difficulties come we immediately run to the Lord for help! But few of us have learned how “to abound” without going overboard and forgetting God.

Deuteronomy 6:10-12 says:

"And it shall be, when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage."

Someone has said:

“Prosperity has done more damage to believers than has adversity.”

In Revelation 3:17, the believers in the Laodicean church said: “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing” There is the tendency to forget God and our need for Him in times of plenty. We can begin to focus on the earthly and think that wealth can bring us contentment in life.

A wealthy employer once heard one of his workers exclaim, "Oh, if I only had a hundred dollars, I would be perfectly content." Knowing that his own money had not given him this inner peace, he told her, "Since I would like to see someone who is perfectly contented, I'm going to grant your desire." He gave her the money and left, but before he was out of earshot, he heard her remark almost bitterly, "Why on earth didn't I say \$200?" The boss smiled, for he had made his point that money can never make a person "perfectly contented."

Contentment comes through faith in God’s providential plan over our lives. And Paul says that I can have contentment even in the times of need or when I am living on the low economic plane. Paul is saying that I can experience inner contentment or this inner satisfaction of heart no matter what befalls me in life. I can have it in the times plenty and I can have it in

the times of need. I can have it when my bills are paid and when they still need to be paid. I can have it when I am sick in the bed or when I am up and running about like a deer. Do you know why? It's because inner satisfaction is not found in outward circumstances. It is not found in money. It's found when we possess faith in His providential plan and will for our lives as we go through the times of despair. In other words, we can find contentment in life only as we learn to live by faith in God's providence over our lives. Paul knew what it was to experience low valleys in life or those times that are so very trying and full of pressure.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 11:27:

"In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness."

Despite all these awful things in life, Paul could conclude that he had found an inner satisfaction or fulfillment that comes from possessing a strong faith in the providence of God. Even in the hour of adversity I know that God is working "all things together for good" (Rom. 8:28). I have learned that by faith in His program and providential plan that I can experience inner contentment. I can take a deep godly sigh of satisfaction and know that God is in control and that He is on my side. Therefore, this gives me contentment in whatever state I am facing in life.

James Whitcomb Riley wrote:

"It ain't no use to grumble and complain,
It's just as easy to rejoice;
When God sorts out the weather and sends rain,
Why, rain's my choice."

My friend, the best thing you can do when it's raining is to let it rain!

1 Timothy 6:6-8 says:

"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content."

The false teachers were preaching that when you get rich you will be godly and content in life. They made riches a sign of godliness and the sureness of contentment. The more gain or money that you have the godlier you will become! That is the craziest thing that I have ever heard! But this is what they were saying and its really what the wealth and health movement is preaching today.

Please notice that this text says that godliness must come first. You need to live godly in life if you are going to have real contentment ("godliness with contentment" - 1 Tim. 6:6). Godliness does not necessarily give financial gain; it itself is gain when accompanied with contentment. Your spiritual gain is not found in money, it is found in living like God and doing His will – this is true godliness. Contentment, when coupled with godliness, brings great pleasure and harmony. If you want harmony in life, then practice being like God (living godly) and then you will experience contentment. Godliness without contentment would give a one-sided testimony. Contentment without godliness would not be distinctively Christian at all. But to have real godliness and at the same time to be satisfied with one's personal circumstances is more than money can buy.

Paul says, "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Tim. 6:7). You never saw a hearse pulling a U-Haul! No, we can't take our wealth with us. So why live to accumulate it? Why get bent out of shape when you lose it? "And having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (1 Tim. 6:8). The children of Israel were not content with the manna that God gave them. They began to grumble about the manna. They wanted filet mignon and porterhouse steaks on the grill! They wanted cheeseburgers with onions and fries. Numbers 11:5-6 recalls what they said: "We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes."

Many times we are not content with what we have and what God is doing for us in the present hour! We want some immediate change and some new thing to light a fire in our soul. We become frustrated that God is not doing something that we think He should be doing. We want bigger

buildings and better methods and barns full of plenty. But God is calling us to a life of contentment, where we can be satisfied with what He is presently doing in our lives and ministries, where He is presently taking us in life, and what He is allowing us to go through in life.

A contented man is the one who enjoys the scenery along the detours of life! My friend, some of you are all bent out of shape because God is taking you around the detour. Stop griping and start living the contented life. Find the inner satisfaction that comes from resting in the detours of life that God sends your way. Find an inner contentment by resting in God's providence. That is how Paul found contentment.

A little girl was walking in a garden when she noticed a particularly beautiful flower. The child admired its beauty and enjoyed its fragrance. "How lovely!" she exclaimed. As she gazed on it, her eyes followed the stem down to the soil in which it grew. "What a shame!" she cried. "This flower is too pretty to be planted in such dirt!" So she pulled up the plant by its roots and ran to the water faucet to wash away the clinging soil. It wasn't long until the flower wilted and the plant began to die. The gardener saw what she had done and scolded her. "You have destroyed my finest plant," he said. "But I didn't like it in that dirt," whimpered the child. The gardener replied, "I chose that spot and collected and mixed the soil because I knew that only there it would come to maturity."

Often we murmur because of the circumstances into which God, in His sovereign will, has placed us. We fail to realize that He is using the pressures, trials, and difficulties unique to our situation to bring us to a new degree of spiritual beauty. Once we recognize that contentment comes by accepting what God has given us, we will be so much happier. We might say that contentment is the soil in which true joy thrives.

3. By relying on the power of God

Philippians 4:13

"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

When speaking about contentment Paul mentions God's strengthening grace and power. Contentment and God's power are in some ways interwoven together. We cannot be content without experiencing God's strength and assistance. Here is another way to find contentment in life. Paul discovered that he could face any situation and do anything through the strengthening hand of the Lord or the Lord's inward power operating in his life. His spiritual strength and stamina came from his union with Christ! This is something Paul repeatedly alluded to in this epistle (Phil. 1:6; 2:12; 3:10).

What did Paul mean when he said, "all things?" Does it mean you can go outside and jump off your house and not be harmed or jump out of an airplane without a parachute and escape death? Of course not. We should never tempt God! Paul was speaking in the context of the will of God for our lives. Whatever God wants us to do or pass through in life, He will supply us with the ability to do it or get through it, by the agency of His Son, Jesus Christ. Whatever circumstance you must pass through God will give you the power to deal with it. This is His promise.

1 Corinthians 10:13

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

Paul was very confident. "I can do all things" (Philip. 4:13) means that Paul could do anything that was in God's will or providence for him to do, even if doing it would mean going hungry or suffering for His cause, even if it meant experiencing pain and health problems. He could face the foe when needed. He could face the ups and downs of life and find that he could do anything that God wanted him to do. He was not bragging about some great religious circus act that he could perform or some giant crusade that he could hold.

No, Paul was talking about doing those very things that God had called him to do and pass through, even those experiences that would require suffering and cause him to be "troubled on every side" (2 Cor. 4:8; 7:5). It's

these experiences of life that Paul could face in the will of God and with God's power, knowing that God was in control of every situation. Even when trouble would surmount, Paul knew that the Lord was in control and would strengthen him, as he passed through God's providential acts. And knowing that Paul had God's power to accomplish God's will brought an inner contentment to his heart.

Paul is saying, "I am ready for anything in life because of the strength of the One who lives within me. I can do everything God asks me to with the help of Christ who gives me the strength and power." My friend, the Christian has all the power within that he needs to face life's demands. We need only release this power by faith. And if we can do "all things through Christ" then we can have inner contentment, knowing that God will see us through every valley and every trial that we face in life.

Paul had learned that the Lord's commands are the Lord's enablements. He knew that God would never call on him to go through some experience or do some task without giving the necessary grace. The will of God will never lead you where the grace of God cannot keep you!

We must simply learn that we can face God's providential dealings within life "through Christ." This too is the secret of contentment. It is realizing that God is providentially working in our lives and that Jesus Christ is by your side to give us the daily strength needed to face the pressing problems and perplexities that life throws our way. Contentment is found by experiencing the strengthening grace of Jesus Christ ("I can do all things through Christ").

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:9:

"And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

It's interesting to note that the Greek word for contentment means to be "self-sufficient" and was a favorite word of the stoic philosophers of Paul's day. But the Christian is not sufficient in himself; he is sufficient in Christ. Because Christ lives within us, we can adequately face the demands of life.

Jesus said in John 15:5

"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."

2 Corinthians 3:5

"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God."

Someone has said:

"You will never know that Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you've got."

Contentment is found in the sustaining grip of Jesus Christ upon our life. It is experienced when I can trust fully in His grace to meet my need in the changing seasons of life. I find fulfillment only as I trust and rely upon His unchanging grace for my life.

Fanny Crosby wrote:

"O what a happy soul am I!
Although I cannot see,
I am resolved that in this world
Contented I will be;

How many blessings I enjoy
That other people don't!
To weep and sigh because I'm blind,
I cannot, and I won't."

When you walk on the beach to watch the sunset you do not call out, "A little more orange over to the right, please," or "Would you mind giving us less purple in the back?" No, you enjoy the always-different sunsets as they are painted across the sky. In a similar way, we can learn as believers to enjoy each phase of our lives and find contentment where we are at in life. As we grow older we can easily lose this contentment as our world starts caving in all around us and as our body begins to fail us. But we must remember that the Lord of hosts is with us! The Lord will sustain us by His strengthening grace and bring this inner satisfaction and contentment into

our lives. And He does this through the changing phases of our lives, even when we think we cannot take it anymore. His grace keeps us content! And contentment is what we need in life. We must learn to be content with what we have and what we experience in life through the grace of our wonderful Lord.

The Hope Health Letter (10/95) included this story:

Once upon a time, there was a man who lived with his wife, two small children, and his elderly parents in a tiny hut. He tried to be patient and gracious, but the noise and crowded conditions wore him down. In desperation, he consulted the village wise man. "Do you have a rooster?" asked the wise man. "Yes," he replied. "Keep the rooster in the hut with your family, and come see me again next week." The next week, the man returned and told the wise elder that living conditions were worse than ever, with the rooster crowing and making a mess of the hut. "Do you have a cow?" asked the wise elder. The man nodded fearfully. "Take your cow into the hut as well, and come see me in a week." Over the next several weeks, the man--on the advice of the wise elder--made room for a goat, two dogs, and his brother's children. Finally, he could take no more, and in a fit of anger, kicked out all the animals and guests, leaving only his wife, his children, and his parents. The home suddenly became spacious and quiet, and everyone lived happily ever after.

Well, the story tells us that the man went back to what he originally had and found that he was actually content with his original position in life. The point is this. We need to find contentment in relationship to where we are at in life. If we can't be content with our present state of affairs, then we will never find contentment when life takes us in another direction. The point is this. God has promised that we can possess contentment through the turns and twists of life and when life does not seem fair. Contentment can be experienced on the mountain top and also in the valley. Our circumstances do not affect true spiritual contentment that comes from the Lord.

4. By reflecting on the provision of God

Philippians 4:14-23

“Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction. Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God. But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Salute every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren which are with me greet you. All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”

Paul found contentment in God's provision that was given to him through the gifts of others. Paul was not sharing the truth regarding God's strength and provision to suggest that the saint's gift to him was not generous or sufficient. In fact, Paul reminds them that they were the only church that helped him financially when he left Macedonia. The wording, “the beginning of the gospel” (Phil. 4:15) refers to when the people first heard the Gospel message by Paul and were gloriously saved. They had a new child-like hunger for God, and they learned how to give to the work of the Lord in those infant days.

In a similar way, we need to remember what it was like when we first heard the Gospel and came to Christ. We may need our first love restored (Rev. 2:4). We need to remember how we were excited over our decision for Christ and how we wanted to save the world and pay off the church building and all the other things that we promised to do but never came through on.

My point is this, contentment does not mean that we lack zeal and the desire for spiritual advancement and vision. It does not mean that we must just sit in a chair and lose enthusiasm for the work of the Lord and seeing souls saved. Contentment does not minimize our desire to do God's work. However, we can find a real contentment in whatever place the Lord has

called us to serve and whatever He wants us to do at the present time. We don't need bigger buildings, a worship team, and a new sound system to be content. Furthermore, we are never to be content with our spiritual progress in life. We should always keep pressing on to be more like Christ (Phil. 3:12-14). It is right to be content with what we have but never with what we are. So, contentment does not mean to become careless in our personal growth and living or become lax in our desire for spiritual advancement in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58).

Well, Paul realized that God's providence was working in connection with the gifts that the Philippian believers had given to him. So, he thanks the people for their generous gifts and realized that he could rest in the provision of God for his life, as the people of God met his financial need. The Philippians gave a gift to Paul when he originally left Macedonia (Phil 4:15) and he speaks about this gift to the Corinthian church (2 Cor. 11:8-9). But we also read about how these Philippian believers gave to Paul two other gifts on several different occasions while he ministered at Corinth.

Philippians 4:16

"For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity."

We must remember that sometimes God provides our needs through other people. This was the case in Paul's life in connection with his financial gift received from the believers. This brings us to the place where we must ask ourselves these questions: Am I a people person? Am I reaching out to others to help meet their needs? Maybe God wants to meet a person's need this week through your own act of generosity and compassion. Let us learn the lesson of reaching out to people.

As Paul speaks about the provision of God for his life he speaks about the gift that the believers shared with him in three specific ways.

- Their gift was like a budding tree.

Philippians 4:10

"But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity."

We have seen this already. The word “flourished” carries the idea of a flower or tree budding or blossoming. Paul was saying that their gift to him was like a spiritual springtime in his life, even when he was passing through the cold wintry trials of life. Their gift was like a blossoming rose or tree in the springtime which manifested beauty, fragrance and blessing to Paul.

- Their gift was like an investment.

Philippians 4:17

"Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account."

Paul looked on their missionary gift as an investment that would pay them rich spiritual dividends in eternity. The word “account” speaks of their spiritual bank account in Heaven. They were laying up treasures in Heaven by helping to support him financially. My friend, the Lord keeps the books or records in Heaven and will never fail to pay one spiritual dividend that we have earned! We are poor in view of eternity when we fail to share materially with others. How big is your heavenly bank account?

- Their gift was like a sacrifice.

Philippians 4:18

"But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God."

Paul looked on their gift as a spiritual sacrifice laid on the altar to the glory of God. There are such things as “spiritual sacrifices” in the Christian life (1 Peter 2:5). We are to yield our bodies as spiritual sacrifices (Rom. 12:1–2) as well as the praise of our lips (Heb. 13:15). Good works are a sacrifice to the Lord (Heb. 13:16) and so are the lost souls that we are privileged to win to Christ (Rom. 15:16). Here, Paul sees the Philippian believers as New Testament priests, giving their offering as a sacrifice to the Lord. What a beautiful picture this is in relationship to our giving to the work of the Lord.

What we give is like a priestly service rendered up to God and it becomes a sweet-smelling savor that is well pleasing to Him. Of course, Paul is using the Old Testament sacrifices as a way to illustrate how God accepts our gifts that we use for His service. They are like sweet fragrance in the nostrils of God. Such offerings pleased God because they came from obedient hearts. And my friend this is why we need to put our heart into all of our giving today. Has God been pleased with the way that you have been giving?

Well, all these gifts speak of the provision of God that Paul received from the Lord. Paul did not see this gift as simply coming from Philippi. He saw it as the supply of his need from Heaven. As we've already said, God many times will use the channel of other people to meet our needs.

Philippians 4:19 then goes on to say:

"But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

This is the provision of God! God provided for Paul through the financial giving of these saints. But you can be sure that Paul's trust was in the Lord ("But my God").

We see in this statement a great **Supplier** – "God." Friend, if God cannot meet your emotional, physical and spiritual needs in life then nobody can! My friend, God is the answer to life! Everything else is a hoax! God is the spiritual doctor of your soul. He can meet all of your needs.

Next we see the great **promise** – "all your need." There is a total supply for a total need. God's supply is infinite, abundant, inexhaustible, limitless, and boundless. Then we see the great resources – "God's riches in glory" or from the very throne room of Heaven itself. Paul also states that God gives, "according to his riches," not out of His riches. This means that God gives to us abundantly from all the wealth that He possesses. God does not just give out of His riches in a small supply but accordingly or in proportion to the great mass of riches that He has for us in Christ.

If a millionaire gave a dime to a child, he would be giving out of his riches. But if he gave a hundred thousand dollars to some worthy cause, he would be giving according to his riches or in proportion to His great riches. This is the way that God gives to His children. We have a great, big, wonderful God who is lavishly pouring His untold wealth into our lives. God always meets our need through His infinite riches and wealth. In short, God always supplies what we need in life. His infinite wealth enables us to meet life's demand and needs, and it never runs out.

Once a lady stopped at a little town on the Welsh coast. Noticing that all the villagers were getting their water from the same well, she inquired of a little girl, "Does the well ever run dry?" "Yes, ma'am, very often in hot weather." "And where do you go then?" The youngster replied, "To a spring a little farther on." "And if that gives out?" "Then we go to a stream off in those hills. It's the best water of all." "But if that fails, what then?" "Why, ma'am, it's always the same winter and summer. It never dries up! Never!" The woman went to see that marvelous brook. Clear and sparkling, it came murmuring down the slope in all its freshness and fullness. Flowing to the side of the highway, it was within reach of all and provided enough for every empty vessel. This is true of God's provision for our lives. There will always be enough to go around. It will never run dry.

Lastly, look at the great and glorious **channel** - "by Christ Jesus." There is no end to the abundant provisions that God has to meet our needs in life because He gives all of these blessings to us "by Christ Jesus." The place is glory! And the person up yonder in glory is Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:3). And our heavenly union with Christ in glory (Col. 3:1-3) means untold wealth and riches for our lives. We are rich! We have everything we need from God. We share God's life!

"By wanting more I've wanted less
Than all You've given me.
You gave Your all by laying down Your life at Calvary
So I surrender all Lord
My best to You I give
And thank You now for giving me a reason to live.

You're all I need
You're the Lord of everything.
All I need, this is why I humbly sing,
Your strength is sustaining and your grace has made me free
You're my hearts lone desire, You're all I need."

Ephesians 1:3

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

This obviously means the wealth of riches that we have in Christ in view of our union with Him in glory. And all this heavenly wealth can be transferred to our own personal lives when we draw from the person and power of Jesus Christ, who lives within us to meet our every need – emotional, spiritual and physical. God promises to meet our temporal needs in life and spiritual needs such as providing us with pardon, peace and perpetual power. And all these blessings flow forth from our living union with the risen Christ who is in glory. We have the total blessing of God upon our lives because of the person who lives within us – Jesus Christ. Every blessing that we have in life and every need that God meets in our lives comes directly from our union with the risen Christ. God ultimately supplies all our needs through the direct power and providential workings of His Son. Come the fount of every blessing! An unknown poet penned this touching biography.

"In the heart of London city,
'Mid the dwellings of the poor,
These bright, golden words were uttered,
'I have Christ! What want I more?'

Spoken by a lonely woman
Dying on a garret floor,
Having not one earthly comfort--
'I have Christ! What want I more?'

He who heard them ran to fetch her
Something from the world's great store;
It was needless--died she, saying,
'I have Christ! What want I more?'

But her words will live forever.
I repeat them o'er and o'er.
God delights to hear me saying,
'I have Christ! What want I more?'

Look away from earth's attractions;
Friend, those joys will soon be o'er;
Rest not till thy heart exclaimeth,
'I have Christ! What want I more?'"

There is an interesting contrast between Philippians 4:18 and 19. We might state it this way if we were to paraphrase Paul: "You people meet my need, and God is going to meet your need. You met one need that I have, but my God will meet all of your needs. You gave out of your poverty, but God will supply all your needs out of His riches in glory!" What an amazing promise! I wonder if we really believe it today. God promises to meet our own needs in a special way when we reach out to meet the needs of others. This seems to be the real intent of this passage.

Proverbs 11:25 also verifies this truth:

"The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself."

Proverbs 19:17 also says:

"He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again."

Jesus said in Matthew 5:7:

"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy."

God promises to meet our needs in life as we learn to reach out to others and seek to meet their needs. But what are needs?

Someone has said:

"Many people want what they don't need and need what they don't want."

God has not promised to supply our greeds. God has not promised to meet our fleshly desires. God promises to meet all our need, not all of our

wishes, wants, or whimsical ideas. We sometimes wonder why God did not give us something that we thought we needed? It's because it was not a need! When the child of God is in the will of God, serving the needs of others, then he will have every need met. This is a promise from God. It is the assurance of His divine supply.

2 Corinthians 9:7-8

"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work."

Hudson Taylor often said:

"When God's work is done in God's way for God's glory, it will not lack for God's supply."

Nehemiah 9:19-20 reminds us how God met the needs of the Israelites in the wilderness. "Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to shew them light, and the way wherein they should go. Thou gavest also thy good spirit to instruct them, and withheldest not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst."

God will meet our needs! He will always provide the manna we need. Do you believe this? How strong is your faith in this blessed promise of God?

2 Corinthians 9:8 says:

"And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work."

Now comes Paul's closing benediction and doxology to these saints.

Philippians 4:20-23

"Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Salute every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren which are with me greet you. All

the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

Paul closes this great book as he started it (Phil. 1:2) – with the grace of God. Grace is what we need for our daily living! And God's grace is sufficient to meet all your needs. If you live by grace then you will not go down under in life. God by His strengthening and enabling grace will meet your need. As we place faith in the person of God and the providence God and the God of all power and provision we can be sure to find contentment in life. And living with contentment as we face the ups and downs of life is a blessing beyond description. It keeps us stable and from wavering back and forth in a fit of distress and discontentment.

So, contentment comes from these wonderful resources. Our resources are the *person* of God (vs. 10), the *providence* of God (vs. 11-12), the *power* of God (vs. 13) and the *provision* of God (vs. 14-23). These resources made Paul courageously face every demand of life and brought contentment into his own heart. And these same resources can make us courageous and content as well.

Leaning on his fence one day, a devout Quaker was watching a new neighbor move in next door. After all kinds of modern appliances, electronic gadgets, plush furniture, and costly wall hangings had been carried in, the onlooker called over, "If you find you're lacking anything, neighbor, let me know, and I'll show you how to live without it." That Quaker and the apostle Paul apparently had one thing in common - they had learned the secret of contentment! Have you? Are you ready to stop running around, envying others, and wanting more than you have? Are you ready to find satisfaction in Christ and your spiritual walk and relationship with Him?

Psalm 23:1

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."

What a provision we have in God! God meets all our truest needs so we can be content and say, "I shall not want." Although Nancy earned a meager living by hard work, she was a radiant, triumphant believer. One day a

wealthy lady with a very gloomy outlook on life said to her, "You're happy now, but what about later? Or suppose your employer moves and you have no job? Or suppose..." Nancy broke in, "Stop! I never suppose! The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want," Then she added, "And it's all those 'supposes' that are making you so miserable. Why don't you give them up and trust the Lord completely?"

Psalm 23:5

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over."

A table! A banquet! A refreshing supply of oil! A cup that is running over! God truly has promised to meet all our needs in life. A saintly man, who had few possessions but enjoyed the simple things of life, was conversing one day with a millionaire. Consumed with the passion for making money, the financier was always gathering wealth but had no time to help others or attend to the important matter of his soul. The happy Christian said to his friend, "You know, Bob, I'm richer than you are. I have as much money as I want, but you don't!" His wise observation was a true commentary on the bitter fruit of setting one's affection on this world's goods and always wanting more!

When we have a close and intimate relationship with God we will not need more money or material things to satisfy us. This is because more will never bring contentment into our lives. This Biblical study has revealed that if we will rejoice in our relationship with God, rest in the providence of God over our lives, rely on the power of God, and reflect on the provision of God, then we will experience real contentment in life. True contentment is only found in God. Everything else is but dust!