

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church / September 6, 2020 / Pastor Jeff Harrison
Philippians: It's All About Jesus
Learning Contentment (Philippians 4:10-23)

Shoe story introduces our struggle with contentment (and relevance of topic)

In elementary, I got into basketball and really wanted my parents to buy me some Air Jordan's. Here they are, in all their glory. The black Jordan 5's, with the Jumpman logo and Nike Air there on the side, very advanced technology for the day. I wanted them and would not be content until I had them.

That's what I wanted. But what do you want? What's missing from your life that if you got it, you'd finally be content?

Is it cool friends, good grades, better family relationships, a better figure, your dream job, going back to 2019, getting married, having kids or kids turning out better, finally getting grandkids, better health, enough saved for your dream vacation and retirement? What's missing that if you had it, you'd finally feel like everything's okay?

For me, it was Air Jordan's, and my parents shelled out the big bucks to get them. And I wore them with pride to Moss Haven Elementary, and others noticed and told me how cool my Jordan's were, including Justin. And my heart was content.

Justin came from a wealthy family, and then Justin got not one, but three different pairs of Air Jordan's. When we'd go to PE, we'd start sitting in assigned places on the gym floor as the teacher explained what we were doing and had us stretch. I remember almost nothing from that school year, but I distinctly remember looking over at Justin's shoes as we sat in PE, jealous of his rotation of sweet kicks.

Air Jordan's back then retailed for \$125, which in today's dollars is \$248. You'd like to think a kid sitting in shoes of that kind of luxury would be so grateful, or at least content with his shoes. Yet I found myself growing discontent in PE as I looked over at Justin.

Contentment is hard, and not just for kids. Sometimes we never end up getting what we so long for, and its devastating.

Other times we do get what we think will make us content, only to discover over time that it doesn't. As one TV character put it, "But what is happiness? It's a moment before you need more happiness."

So we may feel like we need many things to be content, and sometimes we struggle to balance our many desires, like say having great relationships and excelling at work or school and winning our arguments and living a healthy lifestyle and having lots of fun and saving for retirement.

So contentment is just hard. Yet we all long to feel content, and the people around us (your struggling friend, your impressionable children, your discontent co-worker) could also really use a contented version of you blessing their lives and showing them a better way to live. And yet it's so hard to stay content, there's something we seem to lack.

Orienting to God's Word

When Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians, he lacked many things. He was unjustly imprisoned, chained to a Roman guard, facing the possibility of death. And Paul was writing to a Philippian church also lacking things they once enjoyed.

And here at the end of the letter, as Paul lacked so much, he concludes by telling the Philippian church that he learned something important about contentment while imprisoned. A secret that's incredibly relevant for the Philippians, and for us.

So if you've got a Bible or Bible app, I invite you to open to the New Testament book of Philippians, Chapter 4, as we explore the topic of contentment. If not, no worries, we'll have the verses on the screen. If you're new to reading the Bible, the big numbers are chapter numbers, and the little numbers are verse numbers.

Teaching: Contentment...

Requires Jesus' Strength (10-13) – Let's begin starting in verse 10 of Philippians chapter 4.

Philippians 4:10: **(10)**

¹⁰I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.

Where Paul is imprisoned, there's no prison cafeteria, so if someone doesn't bring you food, you go hungry. The Philippian church is far off in another city, but when they hear about Paul's imprisonment, they send one of their members to Paul with food, supplies, and encouragement. Here in verse 10, Paul thanks the Philippians for showing their concern. But Paul doesn't want the Philippians to feel pressure to help him, so in verse 11 Paul clarifies: **(11)**

¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

So Paul is not praising the Philippians' generosity out of selfish motives, trying to get more from them. As he explains in verse 11, Paul is not in need because he has learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

None of us are born content. Even in a paradise Adam and Eve still wanted the one thing they couldn't have. So we must do the hard work of experientially learning contentment, as verse 11 says.

But what does it mean to be content? In verse 12, Paul describes it this way: **(12)**

¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. 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.

Paul shares that he has learned the secret of how to get along in every circumstance from extreme poverty to prosperity. Whatever it is, it's a secret, so it's not obvious, and yet it's something we all want to know. So Paul shares the secret in verse 13: **(13)**

¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

If you follow sports, you've heard an athlete, after winning a championship reference or quote this verse. But verse 13 is not about God helping you to achieve your goals.

Rather, it's about the secret to learning contentment in all circumstances, which is Jesus strengthening us. That's how Paul has contentment. It's in a close, growing relationship with Jesus, who gives Paul strength. Day by day, Paul depends on Jesus, and Jesus strengthens Paul with His great strength, helping Paul to learn contentment even while imprisoned.

Now this is not how we usually think about contentment. We connect contentment with our circumstances and what we have. Like I'll be content when I get at least two more pairs of Jordan's, or when I matter on social media, or when I'm in better health.

And so when we're discontent, we focus on trying to change our circumstances for the better. And sometimes trying to change our circumstances is a good thing.

But what if good circumstances are not the secret to learning contentment? What if the secret instead is Jesus strengthening you? As missionary Elizabeth Elliot once said it: "The secret is Christ in me, not me in a different set of circumstances." Or as Paul says it here in verse 13: "I can do all this through him who gives me strength."

Bears beautiful fruit (14-19) – As Paul and the Philippians learned more contentment in Jesus’ strength, it bore beautiful fruit in their lives. Let’s see how it impacted their relationship with money starting in verse 14. **(14-16)**

¹⁴ Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. ¹⁵ Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; ¹⁶ for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need.

Paul clarifies in these verses that though he is content, this does not mean that the Philippians’ gifts lack value. The Philippians have done well in sharing in Paul’s current troubles. Their compassionate financial outpouring is good, as it is a good when we give to help Christians who are persecuted or in other kinds of need.

And it’s also good that the Philippians have repeatedly given to Paul’s ministry, as verses 15 and 16 mention. And so we do well as we give generously to the church and to local and global ministry partners.

It shows that our bank balance is not our life, that we’re not living in terms like “I’ll only be content once I can buy everything I want and have plenty saved for retirement.” And as our contentment grows, we also grow more free to give our money away to meet other people’s material and spiritual needs, which is such a blessing.

And because of Paul’s contentment in Jesus, he can affirm the Philippians’ giving without selfishly trying to get more out of them, as he says in verse 17. **(17-18)**

¹⁷ Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. ¹⁸ I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

Because Paul has learned contentment in Jesus, he’s got more than enough after receiving the Philippians’ gift. Paul’s focus is instead on his excitement about more being credited to the Philippians’ account, meaning that God will eternally reward the Philippians for their generosity. And in verse 18 Paul is also excited about how the Philippians’ generosity pleases and honors God.

While Paul is the one now able to eat because of the Philippians' gift, ultimately, the Philippians are giving to God. And so in their giving, the Philippians are getting to grow spiritually, build up eternal rewards, and please God with their generosity.

The Philippians would have missed out on these incredible blessings if they had not learned enough contentment in Jesus to repeatedly give. From what we see in the book of 2 Corinthians, the Philippian church was relatively poor. So if the Philippians were only content once they had enough money for a good lifestyle and plenty saved up, then they never would have given, missing out on the chance to do great good in the world, please God, and gain eternal rewards.

And so our giving to the church and missions is at least as important for our own spiritual growth, rewards, and opportunity to worship God as it is for the good it does for those who benefit from our giving. Todd preached a great message about the blessings of giving a month ago. Blessings that can only happen to the extent that we have learned contentment in Jesus' strength with our finances.

Grows when it's all about Jesus – When we feel discontent with our finances or in any other area of life, we tend to strive for the things that we think will bring contentment. And if we get them, we then hold them tight, unwilling to let go since we think if we lose them, we'll no longer be okay.

But Paul has shown us in these verses that contentment is not about holding onto the right things. As flawed people, surrounded by flawed people, in a flawed world, we can never be assured of good enough circumstances for lasting contentment.

True contentment only comes from Jesus' strength, not from better circumstances. But this contentment requires us to have what Paul has been modeling throughout Philippians.

Throughout Philippians, Paul has been showing us that life is all about Jesus. It's why we've titled this sermon series *It's All About Jesus* and why we've been singing every week *All About You*.

If we asked Paul: What do you want, that if you got it, you'd be content? I think Paul would say things from Philippians like, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." And "I want to know Christ— yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death."

For Paul, it's all about Jesus. And the more we center our lives on Jesus, as Paul did, the more our contentment will grow, by Jesus' strength.

The secret to contentment when we have plenty, and when we want, and when we must let go of a cherished thing we've been holding, is a close relationship with Jesus. As we depend on Jesus, His strength helps us to learn to be content whatever the circumstances. No longer finding our contentment in what we hold, or in the additional things we're striving to hold, but in the Savior who holds us, and strengthens our souls with what we need.

We have to want Jesus most, we have to join Paul in saying, "For me, to live is Christ." That's the only path to a contentment that endures no matter your circumstances. Contentment that's in the only constant, Who is always there loving and giving us strength in our hardships.

This is challenging stuff, and I've been really challenged by a quote about Paul's willingness to die for Jesus from seminary president Craig Barnes. Barnes says:

"As Paul's own life makes clear, the point of being fully alive in Christ, is to fully give ourselves back to Christ. The cost eventually is everything. Even the wonderful joys you have discovered along the way as gifts from Christ have to be given back eventually. This is the hardest part of following Christ. We didn't mind giving him our lives when they were needy, broken, and addicted. But now that we have something going, and are valuing our lives, we want to keep them. This is the precise moment the Holy Spirit leads us to the cross. Why would we go there, why doesn't Paul run from Jerusalem? Why did he willingly accept the cross of Christ? As he explained in his great testimony to the Philippians, a letter written during his imprisonment, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may obtain the resurrection from the dead." The resurrection doesn't take care of any of your felt needs. It doesn't give you better lovers, better jobs, or better health. What it gives you is a new life. So the journey with Christ is always the journey from a needy life to a valued life and from a valued life to a sacrificed life, and from sacrifice to a resurrected life. You are ready for that resurrected life at the point when you most value the life you are sacrificing. But at that point on your journey with Christ you have discovered that you love him more than the gifts he has given you. Now

what you want is to be with him, even on his cross, in order to be risen out of this fearful world to a new life that simply belongs to God.”

That’s challenging, Lord, I believe, help my unbelief. Increase my level of faith and surrender, helping me to embrace that life really is all about You, that You’re worth any sacrifice, and that contentment is in Your strength.

Next Step

This morning we’ve seen that contentment grows the more that it’s all about Jesus. It’s in close relationship with Him, depending on Him, where we receive His strength to learn to be content in any circumstance.

Now none of us have arrived in living a life that’s all about Jesus. Even Paul said in Philippians, “Not that I have already obtained all this... but I press on...”

So the direction we are to head is towards a life that’s all about Jesus, discovering as a byproduct of that relationship a growing contentment in Jesus’ strength.

As we wrap up the book, we could discuss from Philippians many ways to live a life that’s more about Jesus. But I’ll suggest just one next step. It’s how Paul started today’s passage and was mentioned twice in last week’s passage. It’s actually in every chapter of Philippians: rejoicing.¹ So our next step this morning is to rejoice in the Lord.

You don’t have to be a person of faith to rejoice. Anyone can count their blessings, write them in a gratitude journal, and as they rejoice, it can help them to have more contentment.

But this practice is supercharged when it’s not just rejoicing but rejoicing in the Lord. This is more than just gratitude for what’s going well. It is connecting our gratitude with God, praising Him for the blessings that He is providing. Our praise deepening our relationship with Him. Paul modeled this for us back in verse 10, where he rejoices greatly in the Lord because of the Philippians’ concern for him.

And rejoicing in the Lord not only celebrates the good circumstances that He gives, rejoicing in the Lord also includes rejoicing in the Lord Himself. Rejoicing in the Lord as the One Who is always gracious and good, having rescued us from our sins, and helping us to follow

¹ 1:18 (2x), 2:17, 2:18, 3:1, 4:4 (2x), 4:10.

Him, and giving us a hope and a future where we will enjoy Him with perfect contentment forever.

So even when unjustly imprisoned or in any other deeply painful, disorienting circumstance, there's always something for which we can rejoice in the Lord. And if you share a home or a small group with other followers of Jesus, rejoicing in the Lord is a great practice to do together. We're going to need each other to keep rejoicing in the Lord even in dark seasons.

Every week I'm going to desperately need the strength of Jesus, helping me to learn more contentment that's not in Air Jordan's, or successes, or even cherished relationships. Contentment from Jesus, the only One with the power to provide lasting contentment and help us to bear beautiful fruit in our lives.

So let's rejoice in the Lord, beginning now, before we leave, as Rick leads us in the Lord's Supper.