

Joy and Contentment
October 10, 2021
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Philippians 4:10-20

We know the expression “*slept like a baby*” and the joke that goes with it. “*I slept like a baby– slept two hours woke up crying, slept two hours woke up crying.*”

It will come as no surprise that babies are on my mind this week because our new grandson Tyson will be here any day. Even if that were not the case, I would likely have thought of a sweetly sleeping infant as an illustration for this study.

Last week we learned about peace, this week Paul writes about contentment. There is hardly a better picture of contentment than a sleeping baby. Of course, a baby is also the perfect picture of discontentment. Expressing discontentment loudly is how a new baby survives.

A baby’s contentment is totally dependent on circumstances and conditions. Well-fed, dry, clean, and cuddled equals total contentment. What we want to know is how to “learn” the secret of being content no matter the circumstances.

At the end of chapter four of Philippians, Paul was writing a note of thanks to this church for their generosity in sending financial support for his mission work. He took the opportunity to also teach them (and us) about contentment.

Here’s the truth that should change us this week: Christ-followers can “learn” the secret of contentment regardless of circumstances by focusing on our true source of provision, strength, and contentment, Jesus Himself.

Philippians 4:10–20 (ESV) — 10 I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. **11** Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation

I am to be content. **12** I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. **13** I can do all things through him who strengthens me. **14** Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. **15** And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. **16** Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. **17** Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. **18** I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. **19** And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. **20** To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

- Paul was grateful for the missions offering but his contentment came from another source. In verse eleven he said he had learned (key word) to be content in any situation. In verse twelve he described it as learning the “secret” of being content whether rich or poor, well fed or hungry.
- Being content regardless circumstances can be a reality for Christ-followers and it is a “secret” that can be learned by faith.
- “Contented” is defined as *“showing satisfaction with one's possessions, status, or situation.”* I don't want more than I have. I have enough.
- Some would tell us that discontentment is the path to achievement. Never become “satisfied” always strive for more, bigger, and better.
- We could also say being discontented with our circumstances can lead to adultery, theft, addiction, at the very least, coveting (one of the “big 10!”)
- Alistair Begg: *“A covetous heart becomes hostile towards people that have never injured us...we can hate people we don't even know.”*ⁱⁱ
- Want proof? Just scroll through social media and check your “contentment” pulse. Our human nature is not wired for contentment.

- Scripture never says ambition is a sin per se. The focus of our ambition can be where we get off track. Consider two “non-scriptural” quotations:
 - John D. Rockefeller was asked, *“How much money is enough money?”* He replied, *“Just a little bit more.”*ⁱⁱⁱ Getting more doesn’t guarantee contentment; it usually leads to more discontentment.
 - Socrates said, *“He is richest who is content with the least, for content is the wealth of nature.”*^{iv} Being content is TRUE wealth!

1 Timothy 6:6 (ESV) — 6 But godliness with contentment is great gain,

Hebrews 13:5 (ESV) — 5 Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

- Desiring to improve our circumstances isn’t a sin; believing that contentment comes from more money, status, or power is the problem.
- Let’s be clear, Paul didn’t say Christ-followers have to be content to always live in poverty. He said, *“I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little.”*^v
- Let’s be honest about our struggle with this. We quote James 1:17: *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights”* but we find ourselves unhappy with what He has given us.
- How does our Heavenly Father feel if we are continually discontented with what He has provided? Before you “pack for a guilt trip,” let’s acknowledge that left to our human nature we can’t be contented on our own. We need supernatural strength to be contented with what God has provided.
- Don’t keep us in suspense, Paul. What is the secret you’ve learned?
- *“I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.”*^{vi}

- That verse gets taken out of context a lot. Experienced Bible students know it DOESN'T say I can do ANYTHING (i.e. *"name it and claim it"*.)
- J.B. Phillips gave a great paraphrase: *"I am ready for anything through the strength of the One who lives within me,"...The Living Bible puts it this way: "I can do everything God asks me to with the help of Christ who gives me the strength and power."*
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- Verses six and seven taught us that prayer leads to supernatural peace.
- Verse 13 tells us strength for any circumstance comes from Christ. That strength will allow me to be content regardless of bad circumstances.
- "Content" means "self-sufficient."^{viii} We are to be "Christ-sufficient."
- Most of us know that verse by heart, how do we put it into practice?
- We don't ask God to change the circumstances so we can be content (i.e. *"Oh Lord won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz."*) We ask Christ to give us strength to be content whatever our circumstances are at the time.
- How do I access that strength? I have faith in that promise, and faith is a decision. *"Lord, the cupboard is bare and the wolf is at the door, but I have confidence you are in control and you will provide for my needs, and in the meantime, you will provide the strength I need to deal with my situation."*
- Contentment comes from faith in God and faith is a decision.
- The late Elisabeth Elliot knew something about accessing the strength of Christ in bad circumstances. As a young wife and mother, her husband, missionary Jim Elliot, was martyred by the Auca tribe in Ecuador.^{ix} Listen to her words: *"Faith is a decision. It is not a deduction from the facts around us. We would not look at the world of today and logically conclude that God loves us. It doesn't always look as though He does. Faith is not an instinct. It certainly is not a feeling - feelings don't help much when you're in the lion's den or hanging on a wooden Cross. Faith is not inferred from the happy way things always work. It is an act of the will, a choice, based on the Unbreakable Word of a God who cannot lie, and who showed us what love*

and obedience and sacrifice mean, in the person of Jesus Christ.” - Elisabeth Elliot, Secure in the Everlasting Arms^x

- When we first trust Christ as Savior and Lord it is a decision.
Acts 16:31 (ESV) — 31 says, ...“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved...”
- Having confidence that Christ will give us strength for our circumstances is also a decision to believe.
- It’s a decision backed up by His track record of faithfulness.
*And all my life You have been faithful
And all my life You have been so, so good
With every breath that I am able
Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God^{xi}*
- As Paul continued to thank them for giving to his ministry he reminded them of another promise of God in verse 19: “...my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”^{xii}
- He didn’t say supply every “greed” but every “need.”
- How does this lesson speak to you? Thoughts?

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- Contentment is not wanting more than we have at this moment.
- Desiring to improve our circumstances isn’t a sin; believing that contentment comes from more money, status, or power is the problem.
- How content are we? How does our Heavenly Father feel if we are continually discontented with what He has provided?
(Sounds like an ungrateful, entitled child to me!)
- As we said, our human nature is wired for discontentment.
- Here’s the good news from Paul: Christ-followers can “learn” the secret of contentment regardless of our circumstances by focusing on our true source of provision, strength, and contentment, Jesus Himself.
- Accessing that strength is a matter of faith in His provision and faith is a decision.
- This week, let’s DECIDE to be content regardless of circumstances and ask our Heavenly Father for the strength we need to embrace that!

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- ⁱ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/contented>
- ⁱⁱ <https://www.truthforlife.org/broadcasts/2019/09/18/the-secret-of-contentment-https://www.truthforlife.org/broadcasts/2019/09/18/the-secret-of-contentment-part-1-of-2/>
- ⁱⁱⁱ https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/John_D._Rockefeller
- ^{iv} https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/socrates_163092
- ^v Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Php 4:12). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.
- ^{vi} Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Php 4:13). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.
- ^{vii} Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 98). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- ^{viii} **895** αὐτάρκης (*autarkēs*), ες (*es*): adj.; ≡ Str 842; TDNT 1.466—LN 25.84 (most versions) **content** (in circumstance), self-sufficient (reb, nab), find resources in self (neb), manage whatever one has (njb), (Php 4:11+)^{viii}
- ^{ix} https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim_Elliot
- ^x <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/6767386-faith-is-a-decision-it-is-not-a-deduction-from-the>
- ^{xi} Goodness of God Lyrics © Bethel Music Publishing
- ^{xii} *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Php 4:19). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.