

the quest for

Contentment

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Philippians 4:11-13

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I. THE PROBLEM

A. When Desires and Discontentment Collide

1. "By now I should have been ..."
2. Discontentment happens when ambitions are frustrated. How do we live, feel and relate to God when we don't get what we want when we want it?

B. A Key to Contentment

- *If you have not what you desire, you have more than you deserve.*¹

II. THE PASSAGE

A. Philippians 4:11-13

B. Background

1. Paul is in prison and restrained, but not in need (v. 11)
2. Contrast of chapters three and four
3. Paul is able to be satisfied and at peace with God's will in all situations
4. For Paul, his sense of significance was not situational. His peace did not rest in anything outside of God
 - It was said of Jonathan Edwards that "happiness was out of the reach of his enemies."²

¹ Thomas Watson, *The Art of Divine Contentment* (reprint, London: Religious Tract Society, 1835), 223.

² Erwin Lutzer, *Pastor to Pastor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic and Professional, 1998), 63.

C. Riding the Arc of Ambition

In verse 12 Paul specifies the field of play for contentment. Bracketing the field are two end zones: one when ambitions are fully satisfied, one where ambitions are starved

1. End Zone #1—Times of Prosperity
 - a. Don't miss what Paul is saying: I know how to abound.
 - b. We learn that our happiness can't be linked to a satisfied dream.
 - c. Proverbs 27:21—The crucible is for silver, furnace for gold, and a man is tested by his praise. Praise heats the soul and tests it.
 - d. The Christian more often disgraces his profession during times of prosperity than when he is being abased.³
2. End Zone #2—Times of Difficulty
 - a. Paul learned to be brought low.
 - b. God was the same in plenty and want.
3. How do you do when dreams and life don't intersect?
4. There is no peace in life until we're convinced that our place is His choice.

III. THE POWER

A. Philippians 4:13

1. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.
2. Paul wants us to understand the secret and the source of his strength.
 - Paul exalts in his relationship with Jesus where Christ helps him overcome weakness, sin and limitation.
3. *The apostle's words (through him) are better translated "in him."*⁴ The Point: Contentment is learned in Christ.

³ Charles Spurgeon

⁴ Sinclair Ferguson

B. The Heart of Discontentment

A heart of discontentment comes from a subtle comparison with others that produces the idea that we deserve better than what we have been given. The conclusion should be, "You have not what you desire, but you have more than you deserve."

Discussion Questions:

1. In Philippians 4:13, Paul assured the Church that he had "learned to be content." How does this theme of contentment complement Paul's burden from the previous chapter, especially seen in 3:14?
2. Dave likened Paul's experience to two end zones surrounding the field of contentment. Where are you facing the end zones of either "times of prosperity" or "times of difficulty"?
3. What has been the fruit of prosperity in your life? How are you, like Paul, learning to look to God when he blesses you with abundance?
4. What has been the fruit of adversity in your life? How are you, like Paul, learning how to trust God when he brings you low?
5. Who does Paul identify as the source of his strength in life (vs. 13)? How does the work of Christ on the cross correct and re-shape our thinking about what we deserve? What steps can you take this week to cultivate a deeper relationship and joy in Christ?
6. Time take in your care group to pray, giving thanks to God for the riches we have in Christ. Encourage the group to declare to God their desire to learn contentment, in plenty and in want.