

The Secret Of Contentment

Philippians 4:10-13

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Let's read Philippians 4:10-13. Paul says, "But I rejoiced in the Lord," there's our theme of Philippians, the joy of the Lord, "greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. 11 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be," here's our theme, "content. 12 I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed," I've learned the secret, "both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." Then, he closes verse 13, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

I heard a story years ago about a Quaker who was watching his wealthy neighbor move into the house next door. He kept watching him bring all this really expensive furniture and belongings into the house. After a while he said, "Oh, I need to go meet my new neighbor," so he went over to meet his new neighbor. He said, "Neighbor, if thou dost ever need anything, come and see me, and I'll tell you how to get along without it." I love that. One of the things that causes anxiety is either we need more money or things, or we're worried about losing the things that we have. Sometimes we worry because we don't have enough money, and there are some who worry because they're going to lose their money. You say, "I can take that kind of worry." Sometimes we're worried about things and we have anxious thoughts and care.

Paul closes this section in a personal appeal and thanksgiving to them for the offering they had given him, but he wanted to assure them that he wasn't in need, that he'd learned how to be content. The key to this passage is in verses 11-12. Go back there with me. He says, "Not that I speak in respect of want," we're going to go back to verse 10 in just a moment, but he said, "for I have learned," and notice in verse 12, "...I am instructed." This "learning" is actually that I've learned, by going through the problems and the hardships of life, 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," I've learned the secret, "both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." The NIV translates verse 11, "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation." The Bible says in 1 Timothy 6, "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," clothes, "let us be therewith content." I love that passage. Paul the Apostle tells us he's learned the secret of contentment.

The question I want to answer before we go back to verse 10 and unpack these verses is: What do we mean by contentment? The word "content" comes from two words that literally means self-sufficient. In the biblical context, self-sufficient is a God adequacy. My definition of contentment, biblically, is that it's a divine adequacy, that we actually have God inside of us, the Holy Spirit, and we don't need to be hooked up to anything outside to bring us joy or contentment, so it's self-contentment or self-contained. It's a self-satisfied contentment in the

Lord. For the Christian, it means self-contained or what I said is a divine adequacy.

You know, one of my favorite illustrations of this is what's called an RV or recreational vehicle. Today, they're literally like houses on wheels. They call it camping, right? I remember years ago I was in my '66 VW bus in LA on a very hot day in the middle of the summer. I was stuck in traffic. Obviously, a '66 VW bus did not have any air-conditioning—I was surprised it even had a motor, you had to pedal those things. I was stuck in this traffic, and there in front of me—I'll never forget this—was this beautiful motorhome. You could see the air-conditioning running on the top. They were walking around with lemonade, some were sitting in their chairs watching a big screen tv, and I was thinking, God, this isn't fair. Here I am suffering in this vehicle while they're all kicking back in this beautiful motorhome.

What we refer to when we think of these RV's is that they're self-contained, right? You can pull them out into the desert. You don't need to plug them in or have electricity or water or sewage, it's all self-contained inside that vehicle. That's the picture of the believer in the world—you don't have to be hooked up or plugged in. You have all that you need in Christ. You have a divine adequacy.

This is the way Warren Wiersbe described it. He said, "It's having a spiritual artesian well within so that you don't have to run to the broken cisterns of the world to get what you need. The power of Christ in the inner man is all we need for the demands of life." I love that. You have an inner divine adequacy, a self-sufficiency, you're self-contained. You don't need drugs, money, the things of the world, alcohol, power and fame, you have a divine adequacy through Jesus Christ.

If you had all the props and the crutches taken away from your life, would you have that divine adequacy? Would you be content? If not, how do we find contentment? Well, notice verse 7. Paul had the peace of God protecting his heart and his mind. Paul was being kept by the power of God, and he was praying to God, he had the peace of God, then he had the God of peace guiding him. We have the peace of God in verse 7, and we have two more divine resources for our divine adequacy. In verse 10, we're going to see that we have the overruling providence of God, and in verses 11-13, we have the unfailing power of God. This closing chapter in Philippians is so marvelous because we see that we have the peace of God, we have the God of peace, we have the providence of God, we have the power of God, the provision of God, all of this to get us where we need to have the joy in the Lord.

There are only two main points I want to make tonight from this passage; that is, in verse 10 we have the overruling providence of God, and in verses 11-13 we have the unfailing power of God. Let's go back and look with me at verse 10, if you're taking notes. Paul rested in the overruling providence of God, so how can we have contentment? First, we rest, by faith, in the providential care of God, or as well provision from God. Go back to verse 10. Paul says, "But I rejoiced in the Lord," notice his rejoicing is not in his circumstances, he was in prison, he was in chains, the future didn't look too bright for Paul, his life was online, but he said, "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly," so when our focus is the Lord, and we're living in a relationship with the Lord, no

matter what our circumstances are we can have the joy of the Lord.

Paul says, "...that now at the last," notice this statement, "your care of me hath flourished again." I'm going to come back to that, but what Paul's talking about is the offering that they collected in Philippi and sent to Rome for Paul's provision at the hands of Epaphroditus. When he's talking about, "your care of me," he's not saying you worried about me, but said you gave an offering to me. He says, "...wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity." The context of what Paul is saying in Philippians 4:10-19 contains the context of the basis that the believers in Philippi...the only church that ever financially supported Paul was the church at Philippi. It was founded on his second missionary journey. You can read about it in Acts 16. They had actually sent a gift or an offering to him.

Every time Paul collected offerings when he ministers, it was for other churches, ministries, and other people. He never took an offering for himself, but he worked with his own hands to provide for his own needs. That's where we get the concept of being a tent maker, tent-making ministry, where we actually work and don't allow the body of Christ to support us. Paul did allow, in partnership, the church at Philippi to support him. This is one of the several reasons why it seems this church at Philippi was very near and dear to the heart of the apostle Paul.

I can't wait until next Wednesday night. He's going to say, "Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account." He talks about the offering that was given to him, and by the way, I said it goes from verses 10-19. I don't want to get ahead of myself, but verses 11-13 are parenthetical, and I'll explain it when we get there. He starts on this topic of the gift in verse 10, then he comes back to it in verses 14-19. A lot of times people study or read the end of Philippians and don't really get this. Basically, Paul was thanking them for the gift that they sent.

Look with me in Philippians 4:18 real quick, a little sneak peek. He says, "But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received," here it is, "of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you," that's the offering, that gift from Philippi, and he describes it as, "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God." He's talking about the offering that they collected, and then they put it in the hands of Epaphroditus who carried it from Philippi all the way to Rome and gave it to Paul so that he could rent his own hired house and have food and things to take care of those who were there with him.

Go back with me to verse 10. Paul says, "But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again." Earlier in his ministry, they had supported him financially. Then, there was a time period when they lost contact with Paul, lost opportunity to give to Paul, but now it had flourished again, verse 10. The word "flourished" is a word picture. It was used of a tree that had gone dormant in the fall and winter and was now budding and bringing forth leaves in the spring. Their relationship had gone through the fall and winter times, but now it's budding again. It had flourished again. It's a word picture of a tree that's giving buds, and they had given him his offering.

Paul's "thank-you" is what we have in verses 10-19. In many, many ways, the letter of Paul to the Philippians is a "thank-you" letter. It is more technically a missionary "thank-you" letter. When Paul says (again, I'm kind of getting ahead of myself, this is next week), "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory," he's talking to people who were generous and had supported him so, "In light of your generosity," and their giving to him, he said, "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Philippians could be referred to as a missionary "thank-you" letter. He's writing back to the church thanking them for their support.

Moffatt renders verse 10, "For what you lacked was never a care but the chance to show it." Notice what Paul says in verse 10, "...your care of me hath flourished again," and the King James is a little challenging, "wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity." Let me free-paraphrase that. He said, "You cared about me, but you didn't have the opportunity to support me." The problem wasn't that they didn't care, the problem was they didn't have opportunity. Their care had not really been the issue, the issue had been the opportunity. Now, they had an opportunity that their care, their concern for him, was shown in the offering that they were giving.

In this passage it actually indicates that Paul was more concerned and thankful for the giver of the gift than the gift. He wasn't all excited, "Oh! Look at all the money they sent me!" He knew that it brought them together in Christian fellowship. He knew that it was an expression of their love for him, so there was a *koinonia* there in their giving—a camaraderie, a oneness—so he was thankful to the Lord and rejoicing in the Lord that their love for him had been given another opportunity to be demonstrated to him.

By way of application, and as I said, we're not in the doctrinal section anymore so it's always the principle or the concept behind the text, that is, what we see is that many times we have an opposite situation from those in Philippi. In Philippi they had—listen carefully—the care but lacked the opportunity; we have the opportunity, but we lack the care. Many times we have all kinds of opportunity to give to God, support God's work, support the ministry of God's work, but we don't care. What we need to do is pray, "God, give me a heart to care for the work of the ministry and to participate in giving out of love." The Bible says the Lord loves a cheerful giver. That word "cheerful" in the Greek means hilarious giver, so you don't give out of necessity or pressure from others but out of the love and joy of your heart. We sometimes are in the opposite category where we have opportunity, but we lack the care. They had the care, but they lacked the opportunity. Now, the two had come together, and Paul was rejoicing for their generosity and for the demonstration of their love.

Another principle that I'd like to draw from this text is that Paul rested in the providence of God. Everything Paul says in dialoging with the believers in Philippi about their financial support, over all of that, was that Paul trusted in the Lord, that Paul's confidence was in the Lord, that Paul's faith was in the Lord. We should have the same kind of faith and confidence in the Lord. When we do, then we can have true contentment. The doctrine of providence is seen in the background of this text. Providence teaches us that God's world in our lives are not ruled by

chance or by fate but by God. If you want to have contentment and you want to know how to abase and you want to know how to abound, you want to know how to be resting in the providence of God. That means that God is in control of your life, that God takes care of you, God watches over you, that as God's children we can rest in the fact that God is in control.

The doctrine of God's providence is interesting because it's all through the Bible but the word itself doesn't appear in Scripture. If you lookup the word "providence" in a Concordance to try to do a Bible study on this subject, you won't find the word, but the doctrine is seen in God's providential care. What it means is that God is sovereign and that in His sovereign love He takes care of, watches over, provides for, and protects His people. It's a marvelous, marvelous truth.

Let me give you some examples of God's providence in the Bible. This is just a small sampling. There are so many examples. I love the story of when Elijah the Prophet went to King Ahab, the wicked king who was married to the wicked queen, Jezebel. At the direction of the Lord, Elijah told the king, "There isn't going to be dew nor rain, but according to my word for three years," because God was judging the nation of Israel for their wickedness and apostasy, and then he turned and walked out of the king's court. What happened was there was no rain, no rainfall, for three years. There was a drought, and because there was a drought, there was a famine. What happened was that Elijah, the man of God, was actually going to suffer along with the wicked unbelievers because of their sin. A lot of times we suffer here in the United States because of wicked men, but God providentially takes care of us. Amen? When I think about how we really can't trust our own government, and I think about how dangerous it is now to live in this wicked world we live in, I'm so glad that I have a Father in Heaven who watches over and takes care of me. Amen?

Elijah was told by God to go down to the brook Cherith, and there God actually sent ravens to "...bring him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening." How many of you have ever had a raven show up on your front porch with a double-double from In-N-Out? Why are you laughing? Have you ever had your lunch on the beach, you went down to the water, and seagulls were ripping your food apart? If you're at the beach and you leave your food on the beach, you better be careful. These guys are crazy. Birds don't just naturally bring you food, they steal your food. But God, in His providence, taking care of the prophet, "...he drank of the brook," and every morning (flying noise), these birds came in and dropped him some bread and meat, and every evening they would come flying in dropping bread and food to eat. You talk about God's providential care.

But then, because of the drought, the brook dried up, so God then sent him down to the widow at Zarephath. As he was approaching this widow, she was out gathering sticks because of the drought and famine. She was going to build a little fire. She just had a handful of bread or meal that she was going to bake, and she and her son would eat it and then they were going to die. Elijah sees this widow and says, "Thus saith the Lord, feed me first," that's a paraphrase. If I were the widow, I would've hit him in the head with my stick, "Who do you think you are, prophet boy?" She actually said, "See this stick? I'm gathering wood to make a fire. See this handful of

meal? I'm going to bake my last cake, my son and I are going to eat it, and then we're going to die. You want me to feed you first?" He reassured her and said, "Look, if you feed me first, the flour in the barrel will not be gone. God will take care of it. Just be obedient to God, trust Him by faith, and He'll take care of you." The rest is history. We know that God provided for the widow of Zarephath, and the barrel of meal never failed. She kept scraping the barrel and the meal kept coming, the meal kept coming, the meal kept coming because she took care of the prophet Elijah so his needs were met.

Think about that. He's a man of God being provided for by the birds, that runs out and the Lord says, "Go to a widow's house." "You want me to go to a widow's house and You're going to provide for me there? How bout a king or a wealthy landowner, a farmer, a widow?" God's ways are not our ways, they're beyond our ways past our finding out. What a marvelous thing that is!

Another little episode in Elijah's life up on Mount Carmel after he had the contest with the prophets of Baal and the people of Israel did not truly repent or turn back to God, he went running out in the wilderness, crawled under a bush, and prayed for God to kill him. Can you imagine being so dejected and discouraged that you go out into the desert, crawl under a little bush and say, "God, I just pray right now that You will just kill me in the name of Jesus." That's one of those times you can be thankful for unanswered prayer. God didn't say, "Okay, you prayed it, I'll give it to you." ZAP! you're gone. He told Elijah to just take a nap, and he lay down and took a nap. Sometimes we just need to take a nap. When he woke up from his nap—this is so cool—there was a cake. An angel had baked him a cake, and there was a cruse of water. Now, I'm sure it was an angel food cake. I'm sure it was the best cake he'd ever eaten. I can't wait to get to Heaven and say, "Elijah, what was that cake like? How big was it? What'd it look like? What kind of frosting did it have?" God just spoke to him in a still small voice.

What a wonderful way, through providence, God shows and demonstrates His love for you. How many times throughout the day, in a hundred little different ways, is God protecting you, providing for you, watching over you and taking care of you, and it goes unnoticed. God supernaturally naturally provides. What a marvelous truth that is.

Look at the life of Joseph, all the reverses in life that he had. In Genesis 50:20, when he finally spoke to his brothers. He said, "God sent me before you to preserve life. You meant it for evil, but God intended it for good." In Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose." Life is not a series of accidents, it's a series of appointments.

Write down John 10:4 where Jesus said, "And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them," so if you're His sheep, He goes before you. Job said, "But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." As for Paul, so with us, God's timing is always perfect. His loving, gracious providence provides just what we need when we need it. We're going to see that God will provide all of our needs. How marvelous that is.

In the second section, verses 11-13, as I said earlier, it's a parenthetical section. I'll develop that more next Wednesday. Beginning in verse 11, down to verse 13, Paul had just mentioned in verse 10 the gift and the offering. He'll come back to it in verse 14, but what he wants them to know is that he's cool. If they hadn't given him any offering, if they hadn't sent him any money, that he was content. He knew how to trust the Lord, he knew how to put his faith in God, and everything's okay. This is kind of a little detour that should be put in parenthesis. He says, "Not that I speak in respect of want," so I'm talking about your gift, thanking the Lord that your care of me has flourished again, you now have opportunity, but I'm not saying this because I want something. How different this is from the evangelists on the television today. When God guides, God provides. Don't forget that. You can trust in the Lord to take care of your needs. He says, "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned," I've been initiated into the school, "in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content," I've learned to be content. In 1 Timothy 6:6, "But godliness with contentment is great gain."

Paul continues in verse 12, "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound," notice these contrasts, abased and abound, "every where and in all things I am instructed," it literally means I've learned the secret, "both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound," which means overflow with provision, "and to suffer need." This is the great apostle Paul who mentions these problems that he knew how to go through. How did Paul learn contentment? Did he get a booklet? A pamphlet? Did he hear a sermon on tv? Did someone give him a book, Six Easy Steps to Contentment? No. He learned to be content in what's called the School of Hard Knocks. Have you ever heard about the School of Hard Knocks? This is a school that a lot of people don't want to enroll in. Once they get into the School of Hard Knocks, they wanna quit school, they want to run for their lives. The only way to learn contentment is the School of Hard Knocks.

Look in verse 12. Paul used the word "abased," "hungry," and "suffer need." Compare that with 2 Corinthians 11:27 where he says, "In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." Here in verse 12 he mentions "abased," "hungry," "suffer need," and in 2 Corinthians 11:27 he mentions "weariness," "painfulness," "hunger and thirst," "cold and nakedness." You know, it's funny. I've never heard Joel Osteen preach on that verse. I'm not sure why.

Paul the Apostle, was hungry and cold? He was naked? Now, that doesn't mean he went running around literally naked, it meant that he didn't have a coat. He was cold. When he was in jail in the second epistle to Timothy he said, "Bring me my coat. It's cold in this prison." Those personal touches from Paul to his companions just makes me want to cry. To think that Paul the Apostle was shivering in the cold and that he would actually come to his end by being executed by Caesar Nero, his head would be severed from his body. Is God good? Yes He is! Does God watch over us? Yes He does! But He never promised we wouldn't have problems. He never promised that we wouldn't have difficulties. Life throws all these reverses at us, but we learn, through the School of Hard Knocks, to be content. He says, "...for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."

I love that Paul makes the contrast of “abased.” This means humbled or down. It’s actually the same concept of Christ in Philippians 2, where it says, “But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant...he humbled himself,” He was abased. It means, “I’m down.” “I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound,” or to have abundance or overflow of provision, “every where and in all things I am instructed,” this is where he uses the phrase, verse 11, “I have learned,” but the phrase, “I am instructed,” literally means I have been initiated into the secret knowledge. It was actually used by the mystic cults for being initiated into secret rites and rituals. Paul borrowed their language. What Paul says is God allowed the sorrows and the sufferings and the abasement to teach me something—that’s why I call it the School of Hard Knocks—to teach me that Christ is sufficient, that Christ takes care of my needs, that I can trust in Him, that I can depend on Him.

Andrae Crouch used to sing that song, For if I’d never had a problem, I wouldn’t know God could solve them. We don’t want any problems, but if we never had a problem, we’d never know God could solve them, right? We’d never give thanks and praise to God. I’m telling you, it’s such a blessing to be able to have walked with God for many years and then to be able to look back and see the providential hand of God and His goodness. David said, “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.” God provides. Cold, hungry, weary, but God is our provider. God is the One who takes care of us.

It’s interesting. In Acts 9, Paul was told, “For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake.” When Paul first came to Philippi in Acts 16, and the church was born, guess what happened to Paul? He was arrested falsely, beaten, thrown into prison, and he came to town to start a church. God used him mightily and wonderfully.

In verse 12, we see the word “abound.” It’s the imagery of a river overflowing its banks, (we’ve been seeing that lately in California). Then, he used the word “full,” which means overflowing in abundance, more than I would need. Proverbs 30:8-9 says, “Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: 9 Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.” It means, “Lord, keep my life in dependence on You. Don’t give me so much that I forget You; don’t give me so little that I curse You; keep me just dependent and reliant upon You all the days of my life.” Paul rejoiced in the renewal of their interest, verse 10; Paul rejoiced in the lesson of his contentment, verses 11-12; and in closing, verse 13, Paul also rejoiced in the enablement of Christ. This is where we get the verse, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” The Living Bible paraphrases that, “I can do everything God asks me to with the help of Christ who gives me the strength and the power.”

What does Paul mean in verse 13 when he says, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”? Does he mean that Paul can run faster than a speeding bullet? It said all things. Does he mean that Paul can jump over a large tall building in a single bound? It said he can do all things. Does it mean that Paul can fly like a bird? No. What does “all things” mean? In the context—whenever he’s abased, whenever he’s abound, “I can do all things.” The first

way to interpret a text is in the context. Whatever I'm going through, whatever problems I'm facing, it is God who will give me the strength. If I'm going without or if I'm in abundance, God will strengthen me, God will help me, God will provide for me.

A great way to interpret and understand that is that I can do all things, that is, in God's will, in God's purpose, in God's plan for my life, all things that God allows in my life in His will, through His strength that He provides. I love this because sometimes we worry about a situation thinking, I don't know what I'll do. If my wife is diagnosed with cancer, I can't bear the thought. If I lose a child or I lose my job or I lose my own health, I'm fearful, anxious, worried. I don't know what I'm going to do. Whatever God, in His providential care and love—everything is filtered through His loving care—allows, you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. Sometimes you get afraid of aging—I'm talking to the old folks right now—some of you are looking at me like, "Not me, Pastor." You just wait, if the Lord tarries.

As we were worshipping tonight, I was sitting in the back of the church thinking, You know, Jesus is coming so soon. He's coming so soon. But if He doesn't come and we do get old, and this old tent starts to lean—it's flapping in the wind and some of the stakes have come up—we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. Whatever your fears, whatever your worries, whatever your anxieties, whatever your cares, you can say with Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me the strength," because whatever He calls you to go through, God will give you the ability to go through it, and if you walk with God and trust in the Lord, you'll find that He is faithful to keep His Word. Literally, this is "I have strength for all the things in Him that empowers me or infuses me with strength."

When Paul says, "...strengtheneth me," it has the idea of infuses me with His strength. In John 15 Jesus said, "...for without me ye can do nothing." Notice He didn't say, "Not much." That would make me feel a little better. "...for without me ye can do nothing." In other words, without Jesus we are all a bunch of zeroes. I just thought I'd encourage you. If you stay abiding in the vine, you have His strength, you'll bear fruit. Whether abased or whether abounding, you will bless the Lord and bless others around you.

Remember Paul's thorn in the flesh? I'm always finding myself going to that in 2 Corinthians 12. Paul said, "...there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." God allowed Satan to buffet his flesh to keep him humble and dependent on God. What did God do? He didn't answer Paul's prayer to take it away, He said, "My grace is sufficient for thee," My grace will strengthen you, My grace will infuse you, "for my strength is made perfect in weakness." What a marvelous truth that is. I can do everything that God asks me to do—keep His commands, resist the devil, serve Him, suffer in His will, trust Him in the storms of life.

We have the peace of God to keep us, we have the God of peace to guide us, we have the providence of God to care for us, we have the power of God to strengthen us. Is it any wonder that in verse 10 Paul says, "But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly." Amen? Let's pray.