



3 May 2024

Learning to be Content

Contentment.

The word inspires many beautiful images. We may not be quite sure of what it is, but we know we want it. An old story gives us a picture.

A rich businessman was down by the wharf and noticed a fisherman just sitting by his boat. Thinking the fisherman was being lazy, he asked him, “Why aren’t you out fishing?” The fisherman answered, “I’ve caught enough fish for today.”

“Why don’t you catch more?” the businessman asked. The fisherman answered, “What would I do with them?” The business man said “You could earn more money, buy a better boat, better equipment and,” he proudly added, “be rich like me!”

The fisherman asked, “Then what would I do?” The businessman replied, “You could sit down and enjoy life.”

To which the fisherman answered, “What do you think I’m doing right now?”

Contentment. Today the word carries the ideas of being satisfied, having peace of mind, having the ability to be at ease, happy. Being content is never passive and certainly not lazy. It does not rule out having ambitions, goals, and plans. It speaks to an attitude in and through all of that.

God gives us some insight in a familiar passage from the apostle Paul.

“I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with little, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need” (Philippians 4:11b-12).

Let’s look at a few important insights from these words.



WHATEVER MY LOT,
THOU HAST TAUGHT ME TO SAY

It is well, it is well with my soul.

The first thing is that contentment is learned. There is a process of becoming a contented person. Paul tells us,

“I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am” (11).

“I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need” (12).

There is no instant or fast and easy track to becoming a contented person. The process of learning, of becoming contented begins with recognizing God wants us to be contented — all of us, including you and me. God will build it into our character as we commit to a disciplined process of evaluation, confession, and positive action.

A second thing is that while we may see being content as mission impossible for us, it is possible. Going on in Philippians 4, Paul tells us,

“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (13),

and

“my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (19).

We need to go to and rely on the right source: God.

Next, we need to see things, people and circumstances from God’s perspective. In this section we see an example of that as Paul mentions the Philippians’ financial support for his ministry, and then quickly clarifies,

“Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek the profit which increases to your account” (17).

As important and valuable as their support was, Paul was not focused on the money, but on the profit of spiritual work for God which increases and pays eternal dividends. We need that mindset. We need to remember and live by what Paul wrote to the church at Colossae,

“keep seeking the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth” (verses 1-2).

One more thing, not from Philippians, but from Hebrews.

“Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, ‘I will never desert you, nor will I ever abandon you,’ so that we confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?’” (13:5-6).

Why be content when you don’t have the things, opportunities, people in your life that you want? Because God is your helper. He will never abandon you. He will provide what you need.

Pastor Lyle