

Contentment

November 14, 2021



Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Philippians 4:10-14

Session Outline

1. Contentment Killers (Philippians 4:10-11)
2. A Key to Contentment (Philippians 4:12-14)
3. Enough is Enough (Philippians 4:10-14)

Theological Theme

Sanctification is a lifelong process in which the child of God grows in Christlikeness. One aspect of that Christlikeness is contentedness in all circumstances of life.



Leader Guide

Contentment

Introduction

- ❓ What has been the happiest time in your life? What made that time such a good period of your life?
- ❓ On a scale of one to ten (with one being 'awful' and ten being 'awesome') how would you rate your life? What would it take to make that number go up?
- ❓ How would you describe the difference between the happiness that the world advertises and the contentedness the Bible speaks of?

Paul made an amazing statement in Philippians 4. He said that he learned to be content with whatever he had—in any situation that he found himself. He went on to reveal the secret to this sort of contented living. His contentment was based on the person and work of Christ, not on his present circumstances. This is the difference between what the world has to offer and what Christians enjoy. The happiness offered by the world is dependent on having the right clothes, living in the right location, making enough money, and so on. All those circumstances are subject to change without notice, and they often do. Thus, the happiness that the world offers is transient and, ultimately, empty.

But those who are in Christ have access to a deeper joy and contentment. Even when the unexpected, frustrating, or tragic occurs, those who are in Christ are anchored to a deeper reality that gives them hope, joy, and contentedness where the world finds desperation.

- ❓ Read Psalm 23:4. Have you ever walked through a dark valley like the one described here?

In Psalm 23:4, David explained that the Good Shepherd was also present with him when circumstances began to crumble into a chaotic mess. This is also true for God's people today. God is our Shepherd in the rough and tumble of life.

Upon emerging from the dark valley, Christians are secure, but not unscathed. Their Shepherd's arm isn't too short to protect, but He may allow them to be struck, to fall, or to stumble. His wisdom and will must be met with a faith-filled "amen" instead of a petulant "how could you?" The wounds of Christians are another occasion for the Shepherd's grace and kindness to be revealed. As Job said, "For he wounds but he also bandages; he strikes, but his hands also heal" (Job 5:18). This is why Christians can be content in whatever circumstances they find themselves. They know that the sovereign King of all is working out His purposes for His own glory and the good of His people.

Session Summary

In this section of Paul's letter to the church at Philippi, he sought to recognize and appreciate the Philippians' generosity toward and concern for him. Paul was in prison and had experienced many trials. The believers at Philippi desired to encourage and minister to him. Paul was grateful for it, but he also wanted to use the occasion to teach them an important lesson concerning the sanctification of those who are in Christ.


1. Contentment Killers (Philippians 4:10-11)

Paul recognized the goodness of the Philippians' concern for him. He encouraged it and rejoiced to see this sign of grace in their lives. But he was also careful to make sure that their care for him wasn't built upon a faulty understanding of how Christians make their way through the tribulations of this world.


In John 16:33 Jesus said, "I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world." Unrealistic expectations can derail a life of contentment. Christians may develop the idea that life should be trouble-free. They may feel that they deserve better than the circumstances that are dealt to them. Jesus knew His followers would continue in a world tainted by sin and that sin would cause suffering. But it wasn't only trouble that Jesus promised. He assured them that in the suffering and hardship they could have a peace in fellowship with Him. Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter. However, his dire circumstances didn't discourage him. Paul expected to suffer, but he knew circumstantial suffering wouldn't pull down his contentment.

When Christians compare what they have to those around them, they often struggle with jealousy and discontentment. A good example of this is Jesus's parable in Matthew 20:11-15. Can you imagine Paul comparing his accommodations (a prison) to other Christians'? Of course, these kinds of comparisons stem from a posture of selfishness and self-preservation.


It is in our nature to feel that if someone else has something, then we should at least have that if not more. This perspective will decimate godly contentment. If Christians look at Paul's example, they will find that he did not compare himself to others or complain because of his chains. Rather, he felt honored to suffer for the sake of Christ.

-  Consider 1 Timothy 6:6-8. How did Paul encourage Timothy to be content with what he had? How might this apply to our lives?

Paul wanted Timothy to have an eternal perspective and to recognize the blessings that he had received. Paul knew Timothy would be tempted toward covetousness and greed. He also knew that recognizing the blessings of God in our lives is good medicine for greed. Unnoticed and unrecognized blessings are the friend of discontentment. American Christians especially have reason to be content. No group of people in history has had greater freedom, more prosperity, or greater security than we have now. Christians who live in the United States should be the most grateful people on the face of the earth. Yet, many are discontent and frustrated. Sadly, complaining often eclipses thanksgiving. This is often due to unnoticed blessings.

-  James warned Christians of selfish ambition (James 3:16). Is ambition ungodly? Why or why not?


James warned against a certain kind of ambition, but he didn't condemn all ambition. Contentment and ambition are compatible. Ambition that operates within the bounds of scriptural teaching is of great use for kingdom purposes. The Bible encourages believers to make the most of every opportunity (Matthew 25). Contentment is not laziness or passivity. Believers should make the most of all the resources they have. This is stewardship. Selfish ambition is a misconstrued version of both godly work and the kind of ambition that the Lord intends. Selfish ambition leads Christians to create idols for themselves. When a Christian's priorities are warped, they end up sacrificing the very things God intends for them to dedicate time and energy to in order to focus on selfish ambitions.

-  Application: What are the enemies of contentment in your life?


2. A Key to Contentment (Philippians 4:12-14)

Paul explained to the Philippian church that he had learned the secret of contentment in all circumstances. He said he knew how to live a contented life both in times of abundance and scarcity. Here was the secret: he knew he would not be crushed, destroyed, or abandoned because it was Christ who would uphold him. Paul knew he didn't have to depend on his own

strength. So, when he faced the direst of circumstances, he was aware of the reality that Christ would strengthen him. That knowledge made it possible for him (and Christians today) to cross the bridge from fear and anxiety to peace and contentment. The bridge between those two ways of living in this fallen world is gratitude.


 How would you define gratitude? What is the connection between gratitude and contentment?

The Bible talks about thanksgiving from Genesis to Revelation. This topic is especially prevalent in sections that deal with worship and a lifestyle of faith and submission to God. We are told repeatedly to give thanks to God. The Bible commands this because it is right in light of who God is and what He has done for His people. The thanksgiving Christians are commanded to give isn't an empty ritual, but an overflow of a life that truly recognizes the presence and power of God. The posture of thanksgiving naturally leads to contentment. If Christians have motivation to be thankful, then they also have reason to be content. When Christians turn their faces toward the goodness and grace God has shown them through the act of giving thanks, then they are also creating space in their hearts for contentment to preside.

 Why do you think contentment and the desire to please others are incompatible?

One of the quickest ways for Christians to undermine a life of thanksgiving to the Father for His goodness toward them is to turn their attentions to laboring for the approval of man. When Christians become focused on being seen as the best, brightest, strongest, most creative in whatever field they are in, then they no longer live a life of thanksgiving, but of vainglory.

To balance contentment with ambition, Christians must learn to live to please Christ, not men. Their ambition must proceed from a thankful heart toward God, not a prideful heart toward fellow man. It can be difficult to move from striving to please others to living to please Christ. It is helpful for believers to remember that at the end of this life the only thing they will care about is God's approval. All the people from whom Christians had hoped to garner favor will fade into the background, and it will be crystal clear that the only thing that ever really mattered was what they did to honor and serve their Savior, Jesus.

 Application: Do you consider yourself a thankful person? Why or why not? How often do you slow down and give God thanks for the innumerable blessings in your life?

Partners in Hardship

In verse 14, *partnering* is the word for “fellowship” (1:5). *Hardship* is “tribulations.” Real partners share difficulties.

3. Enough is Enough (Philippians 4:10-14)

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that “God is able to make every grace overflow to you, so that in every way, always having everything you need, you may excel in every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8) and to Timothy, “godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Timothy 6:6).

These are the only two places that the noun form of “contentment” occurs in the New Testament. In 2 Corinthians it is rendered as “everything you need.” We might also say this simply as, “enough.”

- ❓ What does this teach us about contentment?
- ❓ How does the compare to the world’s version of contentment?

Contentment isn’t rooted in overabundance. The Bible teaches that contentment means not having too little or too much. Christians are neither relying solely on others (too little), nor ourselves (too much). It is akin to Jesus teaching His disciples to pray for their daily bread alone. It also reminds us of God’s command to the Israelites to gather only enough manna for the day. Contentment is the confidence that God has supplied one’s needs and will continue to do so. What Christians have is sufficient. It is enough.

- ❓ Application: Who defines how much you need? When is it difficult for you to leave that decision up to God?

Conclusion

Contentment doesn’t mean every circumstance in the Christians life is perfect. But in God through Christ, the believer’s deepest longings are met. The restlessness that was once in their hearts has been chased out by the promises of Christ. Paul makes an astounding assertion in Philippians 4:13: “I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me.” He explained that the secret to his contentment, his overflowing cup, was not based on external circumstances, but on the person and work of Jesus Christ. Although Paul was in prison, he was also sitting at the King’s table! So are Christians today.

This is the key. The purpose put forward by the world is dependent on having the right possessions, living in the right location, or earning enough money. All of these factors are subject to change without notice. But the finished work of Christ on the cross is a static, eternal reality. In this, the contentment of the believer rests.

- ❓ Following today's study, how would you describe the difference between happiness and Joy?
- ❓ Based on today's study, how can you find joy in any circumstances, especially the difficult ones?
- ❓ Where do you need Christ's strength this week? How might relying on His strength give you opportunity to share with others about Him?

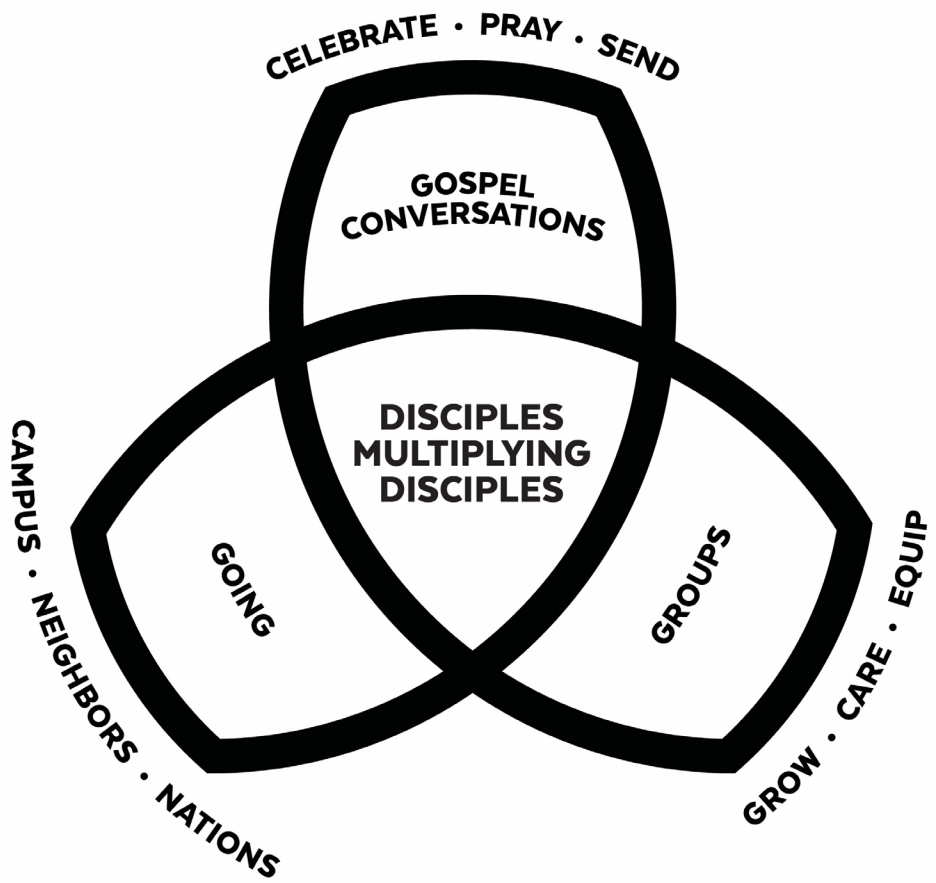
Prayer of Response

Ask the Lord to teach you to be content in all things. Pray for understanding and clarity concerning the ways Christ strengthens you both in times of abundance and want. Ask the Lord to help you to see the many blessings you enjoy and that seeing these would make your heart grateful in Him.

Additional Resources

- *Chasing Contentment* by Erik Raymond
- *Satisfied* by Alyssa Joy Bethke
- *Liking Jesus* by Craig Groeschel

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



For Next Week

Session Title

- Legacy

Main Passages

- Philippians 4:15-23

Session Outline

1. Trouble is Inevitable (Philippians 4:15)
2. Sharing Burdens (Philippians 4:16-18)
3. God Supplies (Philippians 4:19-23)

Memorize

I know how to make do with little, and I know how to make do with a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content—whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need.

- Philippians 4:12

Historical Context of Philippians

Purpose

One purpose of this letter was for Paul to explain his situation at Rome (1:12–26). Although he was concerned about the divided Christian community at Rome, his outlook was strengthened by the knowledge that Christ was being magnified. Paul's theology of life formed the basis of his optimism. Whether he lived or died, whether he continued his service to others or went to be in Christ's presence, or whether he was appreciated or not, he wanted Christ to be glorified.

Author

Paul the apostle wrote this short letter, a fact that no scholar seriously questions.

Setting

The traditional date for the writing of Philippians is during Paul's first Roman imprisonment (AD 60–62); few have challenged this conclusion.

Paul planted the church at Philippi during his second missionary journey (AD 50) in response to his "Macedonian vision" (Ac 16:9–10). This was the first church in Europe (Ac 16).

The text of this letter from Paul suggests several characteristics of the church at Philippi. First, Gentiles predominated. Few Jews lived in Philippi, and, apparently, the church had few. Second, women had a significant role (Ac 16:11–15; Php 4:1–2). Third, the church was generous. Fourth, they remained deeply loyal to Paul.

Philippi, the ancient city of Krenides, had a military significance. It was the capital of Alexander the Great, who renamed it for his father Philip of Macedon, and it became the capital of the Greek Empire (332 BC). The Romans conquered Greece, and in the civil war after Julius Caesar's death (44 BC), Antony and Octavius repopulated Philippi by allowing the defeated armies (Brutus and Cassius) to settle there (eight hundred miles from Rome). They declared the city a Roman colony. It flourished, proud of its history and entrenched in Roman political and social life. In his epistle to the Philippians, Paul alludes to military and political structures as metaphors for the church.

Special Features

Philippians is Paul's most warmly personal letter. After initial difficulties in the city of Philippi (Acts 16), a strong bond developed between Paul and the converts there. Paul wrote to thank the church for a gift it had recently sent him in prison and to inform them of his circumstances.

Extended Commentary

Philippians 4:10-14

4:10. Paul shows his attitude of gratitude by expressing joy over their gifts which Epaphroditus had delivered to him (Phil. 2:25), gifts which continued a long history of the Philippian church's supporting Paul (see 4:16; 2 Cor. 11:8–9). The gifts provided a problem for Paul. He consistently refused to accept payment for his ministerial work, not wanting to burden the churches (1 Cor. 4:8–13; 9:1–18; 2 Cor. 11:7–10; 1 Thess. 2:5–12; 2 Thess. 3:7–12). Thus he never used the term thank you as he wrote the Philippians, and he delayed using the term gift until verses 17–18. He concentrated instead on the attitude of the Philippians and the relationship the gift represented. He used a unique verb to express the freshness of their concern for him, saying it had blossomed afresh like a flower in springtime.

Why the Philippians had a time when they could not show concern for Paul we do not know. Perhaps it had to do with the distance to his Roman imprisonment, the lack of opportunity to send messengers that far, or some problems in the Philippian church. Paul cast all that away as past history. The emotion of the moment was joy at renewed relationship and renewed expression of care for one in trouble (see v. 14).

4:11. Paul makes clear that he was not hinting for another gift. He has solved his economic problems. How? Not with new resources but with a new attitude. He is content no matter what his circumstances. What is such contentment? It is a term apparently taken over from Stoic philosophers describing an inner spirit of freedom and discipline, the ability to conquer circumstances and situations rather than be conquered by them. Such an attitude is the exact opposite of worry and anxiety.

4:12–13. Paul spoke from experience. He had been through the extremes: surplus and poverty. He knew how to weather the dangers of both. This was his secret. Greek and Roman religions had secret initiation rites. Some religions and philosophies prided themselves on secret knowledge. Paul had a different kind of secret. His secret was his reliance on Christ, a reliance gained through his Christian experience. Stoics relied on personal will to gain contentment. Paul did not claim such personal inner strength. His strength came from Jesus living in him. Paul was in Christ and thus content no matter what his circumstances.

J. Vernon McGee writes:

Whatever Christ has for you to do, He will supply the power. Whatever gift He gives you, He will give the power to exercise that gift. A gift is a manifestation of the Spirit of God in the life of the believer. As long as you function in Christ, you will have power. He certainly does not mean that he is putting into your hand unlimited power to do anything you want to do. Rather, He will give you the enablement to do all things in the context of His will for you (McGee, *Thru the Bible*, V:327–8).

The Christian life is not only difficult; it is also impossible unless we acquire the power to live it through Christ. To be sure, this truth does not come naturally to us but must be learned.

4:14. Sometimes the Lord works through his redeemed people to meet human needs. Contentment did not do away with troubled circumstances. Paul knew operating from a Roman jail cell, chained to a Roman soldier, was not operating from a position of power. He was in trouble. The present Epaphroditus brought from Philippi helped. Paul wants the Philippians to know this and to know how commendable he considered their loving action to be.¹

References

1. Max Anders, *Holman New Testament Commentary: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians*, ed. Max Anders, vol. 08 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999), retrieved from <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com>

Author Bio

Max Anders (Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians)

Dr. Max Anders is the author of over 25 books, including the bestselling 30 Days to Understanding the Bible, and is the creator and general editor of the 32-volume Holman Bible Commentary series. He has taught on the college and seminary level and is a veteran pastor. Max provides resources and discipleship strategies at www.maxanders.com to help people grow spiritually.

Erik Raymond (Chasing Contentment)

Erik Raymond is the senior pastor at Redeemer Fellowship Church in Watertown, Massachusetts. He is a frequent contributor to many websites and periodicals, and blogs regularly at Ordinary Pastor, hosted by the Gospel Coalition.

Alyssa Joy Bethke (Satisfied)

Alyssa Bethke is a mother of three children, Kinsley, Kannon, and Lucy, and a dog named Aslan. She and her husband, Jeff Bethke, live in Maui, and are bloggers, YouTubers, and hosts of The Real-Life podcast. Jeff and Alyssa are the New York Times bestselling authors of *Jesus > Religion* and *It's Not What You Think* and *Love That Lasts*. They are passionate about encouraging and strengthening families at familyteams.com a program that brings families together with the idea of becoming a team.

Craig Groeschel (Liking Jesus)

Craig Groeschel is the founding and senior pastor of Life.Church. Meeting in multiple locations around the United States, and globally at Church Online, Life.Church is known for the innovative use of technology to spread the Gospel. With a passion for serving the Church and partnering to reach people for Christ, Life.Church develops and shares resources and applications with churches worldwide. Life.Church also developed YouVersion and the Bible App. Created to help increase access and engagement with the Bible, the Bible App has been installed on more than 250 million devices and in every country of the world. Craig and his wife, Amy, have six children and live in the Edmond, Oklahoma area where Life.Church began in 1996. He speaks frequently at conferences worldwide, hosts the Craig Groeschel Leadership Podcast, and is a New York Times best-selling author.