

3

The Key to Contentment



QUESTION 1:

What makes you feel especially content?



THE POINT

True contentment comes through Christ alone.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Life is filled with stages—and no matter the stage we’re in, we seem eager to jump to the next one.

- ▶ We couldn’t wait to get to high school, but once we were there, we couldn’t wait to graduate.
- ▶ We couldn’t wait to get to college, but it didn’t take long before we were eager to move to a career in “the real world.”
- ▶ We couldn’t wait to get married, but once we arrived, we began wanting to grow that family.
- ▶ We landed the job we wanted, but before long, we set our sights on another job, another position, or even retirement.

For most of us, each stage offers some degree of contentment, but we still have a yearning. Our hearts are hungry for more. If we’re not careful, our hearts can live in discontentment.

The apostle Paul knew what it was to live a life of highs and lows, to have much and to be in need. As situations in his life changed, his contentment did not. In *Philippians 4*, Paul gave us the “secret” to being content regardless of our current situation.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

PHILIPPIANS 4:10-14

¹⁰ I rejoiced in the Lord greatly because once again you renewed your care for me. You were, in fact, concerned about me but lacked the opportunity to show it. ¹¹ I don't say this out of need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself. ¹² I know both 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. ¹³ I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me. ¹⁴ Still, you did well by partnering with me in my hardship.

QUESTION 2:

What do you appreciate about Paul's attitude expressed in these verses?

It's a great boost to our faith when God takes care of us in a way that can only be explained by the work of God. We aren't the same when we see Him provide and no one else can get the credit. Paul knew well what it meant to move forward in faith and see God provide through a community of believers. In this passage, Paul wrote to express his appreciation for the financial support he received from the Philippians.

Some time had passed since the last time the Philippians were able to help Paul. They cared for him and what he was doing, but they "lacked the opportunity to show it" (v. 10). Perhaps they weren't aware of a need, or Paul didn't have a need. We don't know. We do know that, when the opportunity arose, they certainly stepped in.

Although this gift came from the Philippians, Paul knew very well that they were only the deliverers of God's provision. He knew the mighty hand of God was behind this provision. Paul "rejoiced in the Lord" (v. 10). His thanks was to the One who was behind the gift and Who moved the church to care and provide.

Even as Paul thanked them for their concern for him, he let them know he would be fine with or without a gift. The apostle Paul was no stranger to the trials of life that could have easily caused discontentment in his heart. He had been imprisoned, whipped five times with thirty-nine lashes, beaten with rods three times, and faced death and multiple dangers (2 Cor. 11:24-27). Paul often went without food and he knew what it was like to sleep in the cold, yet he could say, “I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself” (v. 11). Paul wasn’t exempt from pain and the trials of this life just because he was a faithful servant; in fact, it seems that his hardships were due to his faithfulness.

The secret to Paul’s contentment? “I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me” (v. 13). Whether he was well fed or hungry,

whether in abundance or in need, Paul found his strength and contentment in Christ.

Paul was writing specifically of his ability to be content in all circumstances. In order to achieve contentment, he needed to depend on Christ for his strength. The strength to rest in God and be fully satisfied came from Him.

It is unfortunate how many people take this passage out of context. Athletes like to quote verse 13 as if it was written to help them make a free throw in basketball or a triple play in baseball. People like to quote it before job interviews or daunting tasks. While we should certainly seek God and depend on Him in all circumstances, the point of this verse is that, however our circumstances turn out, we can be content because of Christ.

PHILIPPIANS 4:15-18

¹⁵ And you Philippians know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone. ¹⁶ For even in Thessalonica you sent gifts for my need several times. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that is increasing to your account. ¹⁸ But I have received everything in full, and I have an abundance. I am fully supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you provided—a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

QUESTION 3:

What’s the connection between contentment and generosity?

CONTENTMENT IN CHRIST

Choose one of the following images that would challenge your contentment.
Then write what you would say to God to acknowledge your contentment in Christ in that situation.



*“Keep your life free from the love of money.
Be satisfied with what you have, for he himself has said,
I will never leave you or abandon you.”*

HEBREWS 13:5



Paul expressed gratitude for the way the Philippian church supported him. In fact, it was the only church in Macedonia that supported him. He was grateful they believed in God's call on his life and contributed to the cause of spreading the gospel. This is a reminder that our churches should be leading the charge in supporting missionaries and church planters who have forsaken all for the great cause of spreading the gospel. Each church planter and missionary should be able to echo the words Paul wrote: "You sent gifts for my need several times" (v. 16).

Through Paul's ministry, he had spread the gospel and helped start many churches, but only Philippi reciprocated and supported him when he needed it. Paul mentioned this fact without a hint of complaint. He focused on thanksgiving for what was done instead of complaining about what was not done.

We are blessed to be a blessing in return. God has not only given to us so that we may be provided for, but He wants us to have the opportunity to be a provision for others. The American dream is to accumulate, while the gospel of Christ compels us to receive and give. We should all live as missionaries on this earth with a desire to spread the message of Christ, understanding that all we have is for Him and the advancement of His gospel. In the end, we will stand before our Father, and we will be held accountable for how we lived our lives. We must be careful that we don't get caught up in accumulating and forget to support the cause of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20).

To save is wise. To be a good steward is biblical. But to accumulate to the point of neglecting the spread of the gospel is ungodly. Live so that you leave a legacy of being a blessing to many!

PHILIPPIANS 4:19-20

¹⁹ And my God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

“And my God will supply all your needs.” What a promise! The Philippians had helped Paul in his time of need. They supported him and sacrificed much. They gave out of a heart of generosity and a love for the gospel. They could do so freely because God would take care of them. Living with simplicity rests in the truth that God takes care of us.

QUESTION 4:

How have you experienced God supplying all your needs?

That wonderful promise gets even more wonderful when we see that God supplies what we need “according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (v. 19). Sometimes we might approach the throne of God and forget Who we are approaching: the Creator of the universe. The One who owns it all. The One who lacks absolutely nothing. Our God is not poor, in debt, or low on resources. His resources are unlimited—so we can rest in the truth that, when God provides, He provides abundantly!

This is not the false promise often proclaimed in the “prosperity gospel.” We can’t just name whatever we want and claim it. That indeed is a false gospel. God is not a genie who is here to answer all our commands, flood our accounts with money, and fill our homes with every possession we desire. God could

certainly do that with His unlimited resources, but our contentment comes through resting in Him, not in an abundance of stuff.

Living a life of simplicity rests in this truth. While we might acknowledge that truth, our human nature always wants more. We often don’t just pray for our needs; we seek after our wants. Having all our material desires met won’t make us any happier or more content, even though our sin nature will try to convince us otherwise.

God will meet our needs—and He will often do it in unexpected ways. We trust Him to provide in His timing and in the way that is best for us.

I have been praying for my atheist father to receive Christ as his Lord and Savior but it hasn’t happened—yet. I’ve asked and prayed, but no answer. Why? My only conclusion is that God knows best. He knows when to give me what I need and how to supply it. I will simply choose to trust that God knows how to supply my every need.

QUESTION 5:

How can our group help one another give glory to God through our generosity?



LIVE IT OUT

A life of simplicity finds contentment in Christ alone. How can you live out that truth? Consider the following applications:

- ▶ **Choose Contentment.** Evaluate your heart for signs of discontentment. Ask yourself: *Am I trusting in money more than in Jesus? Do money and possessions bring me more joy than Jesus? Can I really say, "Christ is all I need?"*
- ▶ **Choose to Trust.** Make a daily decision not to allow circumstances to determine how content you will be in this life. Memorize Philippians 4:12-13 to remind you simply to trust Christ for all things: "In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content—whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me."
- ▶ **Choose to Give.** Give of your time, talent, or treasures. Sometimes the cure for discontentment is to give to others. Find those with needs and give to them. Let God use you as His answer to their prayers.

Regardless of what stage of life you're in, you'll find plenty of reasons to be discontented. Thankfully Jesus gives us a path to true contentment in Him.