The Secret of Contentment (Philippians 4:10-4:23) Memory Verse: Philippians 4:13

September 28th, 2025 Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthains 9:6-15

**[SLIDE 1]**

As we get started here this morning, I want to share with you a few observations I came across about happiness. A few years back there was a documentary released simply entitled “Happy”. In the film, a man from Kolkata named Manoj Singh was featured. He worked grueling hours as a rickshaw driver, transporting customers from place to place with only a flimsy pair of sandals on his feet. His family lived in a tarp covered hut and many days all they had to eat was rice. Yet, according to research data, Manoj scores just as high on the happiness chart as the average American who lives in a home with too many bathrooms and extra vehicles.

Founding father Benjamin Franklin is quoted as saying, “The Constitution only guarantees the American people the right to pursue happiness. You have to catch it yourself.” In other words, nothing is going to be handed to you on a silver platter. The pursuit of something is going to take some effort. You can have all the happiness you want, but you are the one who is going to have to achieve it. Years ago, Ray Coniff put out a song called *Happiness Is.* “Different things to different people, that’s what happiness is.” It was a catchy tune filled with incredible harmonies and some silly lyrics, but even still it pushes the notion that happiness is found in things…different things to different people, but things nonetheless.

All throughout our study of Paul’s letter to the Philippians, I have been referring to it as a **[SLIDE 2]** “context for joy.” Paul expresses joy throughout this letter despite his circumstances. He is in jail awaiting trial and his future is rather uncertain. But Paul is joyful in his relationship with these fellow Christians, in the advancement of the gospel. Paul rejoices that Christ is going to return and usher in the fullness of his kingdom.

Well today, Paul is going to address an antecedent of joy and that is **[SLIDE 3]** contentment. Paul claims to have discovered the secret to being content. Happiness, joy, contentment; these terms seem be interchangeable to some extent, and each of them seems to reflect a disposition in which we have the ability to stop and assess, to take a moment and say, “Life is good.”

**[SLIDE 4]** “Life is good”, indicates satisfaction, a sense of serenity…contentment. Manoj Singh arrives home on blistered and bruised feet with tarp walls flapping in the wind. He hugs his young son, greets his neighbors and concludes, “Life is good.” Paul, writing from prison, looks back on his life. He has lived with plenty, and he has lived with great need. And he can claim that life is good in any given situation. **[SLIDE 5]** (READ 4:10-14)

Paul begins by thanking them for sending money. Apparently, after hearing of Paul’s plight, the church took up a collection and sent Epaphroditus to take it with their blessing. Paul received the gift in gratitude and yet, he also wants to be clear that he did not need it and he did not ask them for it. He is content with much or little. Paul has a wide variety of life experience. From respected teacher (a Pharisee) to a social pariah who was run out of town. From an employed tentmaker to a prisoner of the Roman Emperor. From a zealot who hunted down Christians to an itinerant church planter. Paul knew the dramatic pendulum swings life can take. He had seen it all and he is able to claim to be content in any situation. How is this possible?

**[SLIDE 6]** I can’t hide my irritation when there is an interruption in the wi-fi service at home. I just can’t take it when the check engine light comes on in one of our vehicles. I can hardly go on when I open the fridge and find that we are out of an ingredient we need for supper. How can life be good in such circumstances?

Paul gives us the answer, two answers actually, in verse 13 and 14. **[SLIDE 7]** ((“I can endure all these things through the power of the one who gives me strength.” Now some translations will say “I can do all things.” And the verse is then used as a sort of motivational speech, the kind of thing you might see on a poster in a gym. But Paul is not saying I can do all things. He is not encouraging my athletic efforts or financial goals or my dreams of flying to the moon. Context is king and I think the CEB is right here to choose the word “endure.” I can endure all things, I can get through this, I can bear this, I can remain steady and calm through this because Christ gives me his strength. I do not endure on by my own power, or through sheer determination or grittiness. I rely on the power of Jesus to keep me content in all things.))

**[SLIDE 8]** Scientists who research happiness levels in people, have found that 50% of our range of happiness is purely genetic. We are born with a set baseline level of happiness. Some of us are just built to be happier than others. So, assuming for the sake of argument that these findings are correct, they find that a measly **[SLIDE 9]** 10% of our experience of happiness is derived from circumstances. This is something out culture gets exactly backwards. Wealth and status and beautiful homes do not contribute all that much to our overall sense of happiness. In fact, over the last 50 years, economic wealth has increased in our country almost twofold. There is more money to go around and more personal wealth to be gained. Even still the index of personal happiness has largely remained the same. An increase in happiness does not follow an increase in wealth. So if our happiness levels are half born into us and another dimes worth is circumstantial, what about the remining 40%? Well Paul knew then what scientists are starting to learn now: **[SLIDE 10]** it’s all about what you do.

Paul’s life was characterized by service to Christ and to the spreading of the gospel. He worked to plant churches, to encourage other Christians, to disciple new leaders. Paul was a debater, a preacher, he related to people, got to know them and genuinely loved them. Now, we can’t all be Paul. We can’t all travel the world or spend elongated times in jail. But we can all be faithful to the call that Jesus has put upon our lives. We can all put into action this faith that we proclaim. It won’t look exactly the same way as Paul did it, but it will involve some overarching commonalities. For example, Christ calls us all to love the Lord our God with our heart and mind and strength, and he adds to that, love your neighbor as yourself. The story of the **[SLIDE 11]** Good Samaritan leaves no doubt or wiggle room: According to Jesus, even your enemy ought to fall into the category of neighbor. We take action in order to love people. And in this living for the sake of Christ and others, we involve ourselves with actions that scientifically increase our levels of happiness. People who uphold extrinsic values, that is, values that are beyond themselves, possess reportedly higher levels of happiness. So let your genetic makeup be what it might be, and let circumstances be what they might be, but let us choose to take action to serve Christ and others and in that way as Franklin would say, we have gone out to catch happiness ourselves.

The second part of the secret to contentment is found in others. Verse 14 Paul says, **[SLIDE 12]** “you have done well to share my distress.” Here again, scientists have caught up to Paul. **[SLIDE 13]** The data demonstrates that everyone who reported being happy, every single one, also reported having close friends and/or family members. It supports the old adage that “no man is an island.” We are built for connection, we need each other. Our basic happiness depends on it. Paul does not go through his suffering alone. He not only goes through it with the power and strength of Christ, but he also goes through it with brothers and sisters. These Christians in Philippi have shared in his distress. They have prayer for him, raised money for him, sent people to be with him. Paul can remain content in his situation because he knows that he has the support and concern of his friends.

So there is our answer to the secret of being content: **[SLIDE 14]** Do things, act in service to Christ and do it with others.

Paul goes on to speak of their generosity and involvement with his ministry. **[SLIDE 15]** (READ 4:15-23) Paul is walking this funny line here. He is grateful for the gifts that this church sent to him. He knows that support is not free and he thanks them, but, at the same time, he also concludes that God is the one who meets all our needs. And so, as we say most every week, when it comes time to collect the offering, we mention that God chooses to work through the generosity of his people. God does not need us. God could snap his almighty fingers and create money out of thin air. He could remove any need that we might have as a church. But for God, giving is **[SLIDE 16]** incarnational. Paul mentioned earlier in his letter that we are to **[SLIDE 17]** work out our salvation with fear and trembling. And yet, in that working out, in the effort and strain, God gives us the desire and ability to do so. We mentioned then that our salvation is incarnational: it is 100% on us to work out and 100% on God to initiate and empower. Salvation involves both God’s power and human effort. When God offers the gift, we must accept it. The same is true here of our giving. **[SLIDE 18]** We give from a desire to worship God, a desire which ultimately comes from God in the first place! But God desires that we freely choose to enact that desire, that we truly give from our desire to worship. So, God provides, and he does so through the heart and minds and wallets of his people. Giving is one hundred percent God’s doing, and one hundred percent our doing. Paul recognizes this and he calls the gifts of this church a “fragrant aroma”, an “acceptable sacrifice that pleases God.” At the same time, he says in verse 19, **[SLIDE 19]** “My God will meet your every need out of his riches in the glory that is found in Christ Jesus.” So, as Paul receives this money from this church, he is right to see it as a generous gift given by his friends and he is also right to receive it as a blessing from God that comes from the riches of his glory. It is incarnational, it is both God and man, coming together.

**[SLIDE 20]** When we give money in that offering plate, when we fill our pledge cards, when we set up online payments, we are not paying bills. We are worshipping God. Those transactions are exactly the same thing as an Old Testament Israelite bringing their one year old lamb to be slaughtered by the priest at the temple. When the animal was placed upon the alter and the flames sent up smoke into heaven, God received that offering as a pleasing aroma. The sacrifice reflected a grateful heart. It was something valuable that was handed over to God.

So now today, the material components have changed. We do not sacrifice animals, but we still give of our livelihood. We still come before God and place our offerings on his alter. We still send up sweet-smelling aromas that reflect a heart of worship. And as we watch the flames crackle and the smoke rise, as we give up that which is valuable to us, as we thank God for his provision, we take a look around at where we find ourselves and we conclude once again, “Life is good.”

We read earlier in 2 Corinthians 9 that we don’t give out of pressure. We give cheerfully, that’s our part, and God, for his part, will “multiply your seed and increase your crop.” Verse 8 puts it well, “God has the power to provide you with more than enough of every kind of grace.” Now, I don’t know how many kinds of grace there are but, Paul ties God’s grace to our good works. He says you will have everything you need to provide more than enough for every kind of good work. So every kind of grace from God results in every kind of good work from us.

Good times and bad, in plenty or not enough, in the ebb and flow, on the mountain or valley, we can know the secret of contentment: **[SLIDE 21]** It is found in the actions we choose to take and the people who surround us. It is found in a heart that worships God through generous giving and gratitude.

Some might say that Manoj Singh, the rickshaw driver from the slums of India is only happy because he doesn’t know how good life can be. But the same could be said for the suburban American as well. They don’t know how good life can be either. We’ve taken Ray Coniff’s song too seriously. We have fooled ourselves into thinking happiness is found in things. Suburb or slum, **[SLIDE 22]** contentment is found in Christ, in the actions we take on his behalf and in how we support one another through it all. I close as Paul closes, “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with your spirits.” Amen.