

The Book of Philippians
Contentment: The Lost Virtue, Part 3
Philippians 4:10-13
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Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church

In 1668, the King of France, at the time Louis the Fourteenth, decided that he would build himself a new palace: outside of Paris, far away from the rebellious people whom he'd come already to resent, closer to the hunting fields and forests where he delighted to be. And he did it really to establish and demonstrate his new absolute power as the King of France. It was a monumental undertaking. At one point, thirty-six thousand people were working on the construction. It took almost fifty years to complete. Of course, it's the palace at Versailles. It's a quarter of a mile long. It has thirteen hundred rooms. At one time it housed about twenty thousand nobles. The gardens alone covered 250 acres. It certainly gives definition to what it means to live like a king.

Let me ask you a question this morning. Would you rather live as you do today with your current circumstances and financial situation, or would you rather live as Louis the Fourteenth in the Palace of Versailles three hundred and fifty years ago? Your home or Versailles, which would you choose? Don't be too quick to make that decision. It may seem like a no-brainer, but it's more complicated than you'd first think.

Several years ago, *World Magazine* ran an article in which they compared our living standards to that of those three hundred, four hundred years ago. If you went back to be with Louis the Fourteenth and to live in that situation, you need to remind yourself what you would lose. You would have to do without electricity, lights, telephones, radios, televisions, refrigerators, air conditioners, fans. There were no VCRs, no X-rays, no MRIs, no computers, no internet, no high-speed printing presses. There were no internal combustion engines, so cars and trains and all the other things that engines create didn't exist. You have to do without hundreds of synthetic materials like plastic and all the thousands of products that are made from them. You see, none of those things were available then at any cost. There was no air conditioning – which for me is sort of the deal breaker – no air conditioning, no refrigeration, so there was no ice to put in your drink in the middle of a hot summer day. You couldn't have talked with anyone by any means other than direct voice. And until the advent of the telegraph in the early nineteenth century, you could not have communicated in writing any quicker than you could have traveled.

Travel in those days was another story. It was, even for rich, by horseback or carriage, so a four hundred - fifty-mile journey that most of us could make in a comfortable in seven or eight hours

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(or an hour in an airplane) would take them two eighteen-hour days in a carriage: a bumpy ride over unpaved roads with no heating and no air conditioning. You could only have heard live music, and you could have only seen in sketches and paintings what you weren't there to witness first hand.

However opulent Versailles was with its magnificent architecture and gardens and carpets and furniture and china and silver and art collections, it was also very uncomfortable. Heating and especially cooling were constant problems. Bathrooms were rare luxuries; instead, there were privy pots. Rancid odors definitely subtract from the curb appeal. History accounts tell us that the interiors were often filled with fleas, lice, and bugs.

And you don't want to even think about the medical care. Because no matter how rich you had been, until a hundred and fifty years ago, if you'd contracted a bacterial disease, there were no antibiotics, and so there was no way to help. The most effective anesthetics were alcohol and cloves. And so, when infections set in (that in our day that could be easily prevented or easily cured) and the limb eventually turned gangrenous, you *hoped* that you passed out as they operated with the crude saws. Germ control? Non-existent. The germ theory of disease didn't become current until the late eighteenth century, and antiseptics didn't begin until a half century after that. Got a fever? Whatever you do, don't call the doctor because he'll probably bleed you.

But in the end, the most crucial measure of material prosperity in any age is life expectancy since most people value life over any material good. If you were to go back a thousand years ago, everywhere in the world the average life expectancy was less than thirty years. Most of us in this room would have already died if we'd lived a thousand years ago. But even in Louis the Fourteenth's time, the average life expectancy was less than forty years old. Today worldwide, it's over sixty-five years, and in high income economies like ours it's over seventy-six years.

So, think about your choice again. Remarkably, most of the royalty of the past, given the opportunity, would freely and gladly trade with you. We are incredibly privileged, and we live in incredibly privileged and prosperous times. And yet if we're honest with ourselves, we still struggle with contentment. That's why Paul addresses this crucial issue in Philippians 4, because it is an issue that transcends time: regardless of when and where you live the issue of discontent is there because it lives in our hearts. Paul addresses the issue of contentment in chapter 4 of Philippians, verses 10 - 13.

Now just to remind you, this section of the letter is to thank the Philippians for the financial gift

that they had sent to Paul. And as Paul thanks the Philippians, he teaches them a profound lesson in contentment. Let me read it to you. Verse 10, he says:

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned *before*, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, 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. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

The theme of this brief paragraph is found in verse 11: “I have learned [Paul says] to be content.” And as we’re studying this passage, we’re asking and answering three important questions about the issue of contentment. We’ve answered the first two already. Question number one: what causes us to be discontent? What causes us to struggle with this issue? And we discovered that essentially it comes down to two biblical concepts: that of craving or lusting (that is we desire to have something we don’t have) and coveting (that is we long to possess something we don’t possess, or to possess more of it than we do). Those lie, those heart issues lie at the foundation of our discontent. They are the corrupted spring from which our discontent overflows.

The second question that we asked was: what does it mean to be content? What exactly is contentment? Paul says in verse 11 “I have learned to be content.” That word means “self-sufficient.” It means “satisfied.” Paul adds the concept of delight. So, contentment is the opposite of craving and coveting. It means that in every circumstance we encounter, we recognize that it’s from God’s hand; we submit to it; we delight in those sovereignly ordained circumstances. Don’t misunderstand. Somebody came up, couple of people actually came up after last week, and I wanted to clarify even this week to make sure you understand. Contentment is not an excuse for laziness. It doesn’t mean you shouldn’t plan, you shouldn’t give some forethought to your direction, doesn’t mean you shouldn’t work hard. The Bible commands us to do whatever our hands find to do with all our might, to be wise stewards, to carefully invest our time and our energy and our resources, to plan ahead. No, the issue of contentment is about what’s going on in your heart.

Take two businessmen who both plan, and both strategize, and both work hard, and both are committed to excellence. One of them can be sinfully craving, and the other can have a perfectly content heart. Because it comes down to motive. Why are you expending all that effort? Is it to

accumulate wealth and satisfy your own pride, to achieve a certain reputation? Or is it to care for your family, to be a good steward of your gifts, to be able to help others, and to bring God glory? Here's the test: if you kept working just as hard as you are now, and God chose not to fulfill your plans, could you still delight in your circumstances? Paul had learned to be content in God's plan for him whatever the plan might be. That's contentment.

And that brings us to the third important question: how can we become content? How can we become content? Last Sunday, we looked at the first of four attitudes that will promote true lasting contentment. You want to be content? You want to learn like Paul in whatever circumstances to truly have a contented heart? Then you need to develop these four foundational attitudes.

As I said, we looked at the first last Sunday. It's this: find your ultimate joy in God. Notice how he begins verse 10: "But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly." When Epaphroditus showed up with the gift, what was Paul's first response? To rejoice, not in the gift, not in the change of his circumstances, but in the Lord. He uses himself as an example, and he says don't look for your chief joy to be in people, or in things, or in circumstances; instead, seek to come to the place where you can honestly say that you find your greatest delight in the person of God Himself – regardless of what happens to you. Listen, if you find your deepest joy in anything in this life, then I can promise you you're going to be disappointed, and you will always struggle with discontent. Because nothing in this life will satisfy your soul. Find your ultimate joy in God.

The second of these four attitudes that we start with this morning and look at in detail is this: focus your attention on others. Focus your attention on others. You want to encourage and promote contentment in your own heart? Then find your ultimate joy in God and focus your attention on others. Notice the second half of verse 10. He says, "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity." Now what's the context for those comments? Let me give you a couple of verses that set the context.

Turn, first of all, to 2 Corinthians 11, 2 Corinthians 11:9. Paul, of course, is writing the church in Corinth. And he says to them that "... when I was present with you [when I was there in Corinth] and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia [Remember, Philippi is in Macedonia. He's talking here about the Philippians], and he says, when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so." So, he comments that his

needs, even as he traveled around, were being met by the church in Philippi and by other Macedonian churches.

Now turn back to Philippians 4. He gives us a little more background in verse 15. As he writes the Philippians he says,

You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the Gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone.... [They were the first supporters of Paul, this church in Philippi, on this particular missionary journey,] and he says, For even in Thessalonica you sent a *gift* more than once for my needs.

Verse 18: “But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.” So, you go back to verse 10, and now you see the background of it. There was a time when the Philippians were very much involved in supporting Paul, and now he says, “you have revived your concern for me.” Your concern for me has blossomed again in this financial gift that you have sent through the hand of Epaphroditus.

But Paul isn't criticizing the Philippians. He's not saying, you know, where have you guys been? Notice he says in verse 10, I know you've been concerned about me all along “but you lacked opportunity.” Now we don't know why they lacked opportunity. It may have been that they were – they *were* poor, we know that from the Corinthian epistles, that the churches in Macedonia were not rich churches. That may have been the issue, or frankly, Paul at times in his missionary travels was hard to track down. They may simply not have known where he was to send a gift, but regardless, that's not the point. He says I know that you were genuinely concerned about me, and that given the opportunity you would have met my need, and now you have.

But notice in verse 10 as he begins to talk about their gift, his focus isn't on the gift. He is unconcerned about himself even in that. Even in the issue of his own personal needs being met, his concern is genuinely for the Philippians, not for himself. Notice verse 10 again. He says, “I rejoiced in the Lord.” There's his primary reason for rejoicing: his relationship with God. But then there's the immediate reason for his rejoicing, and it's this: “Now at last you have revived your concern for me.” He rejoiced in that the Philippians were doing the right thing. It wasn't the gift he was finding his joy in, it was that the Philippians were doing what they ought to do.

Notice verse 17; he explains this even more. He says I'm not seeking "the gift itself." That's not what this is all about; that's not why I'm so grateful that you've done this. "But I seek for the profit which increases to your account." Paul says my real issue here, my real joy, isn't that I got a gift from you. It isn't that my financial needs while I'm in this rented room that I'm having to pay for, and where I'm having to pay for my food – that that's now cared for through your gift. That's not what really gives me joy. He says instead, what gives me joy is that *you* get profit in your account for having given sacrificially to meet my needs. What incredible selflessness!

Now you know, you and I have to admit if we're really honest with ourselves, that it would be very difficult to be in Paul's circumstances and truly be more interested about how the gift that you just received, helped someone else than how it helped you. This is the secret to how Paul could be content. Paul was content regardless of his circumstances, because he didn't spend all his time thinking about himself.

If you find yourself constantly tempted to be discontent with your life and your circumstances, I can guarantee you it's because you spend way too much time thinking about yourself. When we spend massive amounts of time and energy thinking about ourselves and how difficult our lives are and how different they are than our expectations, when even our prayers are all about us and what we need and what our problems are, it shouldn't surprise us that we struggle with discontent.

Paul is confined in a rented room in Rome, for two years chained twenty-four seven to a Roman guard, and he's content because he didn't spend his time thinking about himself. He wrote five of the letters in our New Testament from prison, including this letter. He didn't sit there and mope and think about how horrible the circumstances were; instead, his mind was constantly going out from that place, his heart connecting to the people that he knew and loved. He was concerned about them. You can see that in this letter. Turn back to Philippians 1:3. Just notice the flow of his heart here:

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the Gospel from the first day until now.

Verse 7,

... [It's] only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my

heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you ... are partakers of grace with me. For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.”

Verse 24 of chapter 1 he says,

“... to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you....” [It’s all about them.]

Chapter 2:19, “But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I ... may be encouraged when I learn of your condition.”

Verse 23:

... I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me; and I trust ... that I myself ... will be coming shortly.

Verse 28: ... I’ve “sent him ... the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned *about you*” - [when I hear that you’re doing alright.] Chapter 4:1: “Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long *to see*, my joy and my crown....” “My beloved.” Paul is absolutely consumed with others.

You want to be content? Start reaching out to help others. Go visit some of our shut-ins here in the church. Call a friend or a family member for the sole purpose of finding out how you can help them or how you can pray for them. Take an hour and spend it in prayer solely for others. Get involved in a ministry of this church using the gifts God has given you for the benefit of others. Begin to focus your life away from yourself and looking, sort of inspecting your own navel, and turn out and look at others who are in difficulty and trouble, and as you begin to give your life to others then you will begin to see your content grow.

Shortly after Sheila and I arrived at Grace Church in California seventeen years ago, we were mentored by a couple who really became dear friends of ours: Fred and Mary Barshaw. Sheila you remember, recently flew back to California for Mary’s funeral, but Fred died more than ten years ago. Fred and Mary were absolute soul mates. They thoroughly enjoyed each other. So, when Fred died, I think we all would have understood if Mary had turned a bit inward after his death. But shortly after Fred’s death, Mary and Sheila had lunch, and Mary said this to Sheila,

she said, “Fred’s gone, but I’m not going to sit around and feel sorry for myself. This is God’s best. I’m going to try to be the best widow I can be.” She immediately began to set out, to reach out to her friends, her family, to her younger disciples. She was never discontent, never bitter, because she understood that the secret to contentment is to focus your life on others. Focus your life on others.

The third attitude that will promote contentment is: to fix your flawed thinking about your circumstances. Fix your flawed thinking about your circumstances. Notice verses 11 and 12:

Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, 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.

You see, the secret to Paul’s contentment is that he had learned to think correctly about his circumstances, and this where most of us go astray. We convince ourselves that if only our circumstances were different, then we would be content. Listen, if you ever want to learn to be content like Paul, then you must change your thinking about your circumstances.

How exactly do you change your thinking? Well there’re several clues here about our flawed thinking and how we should correct it. First of all, we could put it this way: understand that our circumstances aren’t the cause of our sinful discontent. Understand that your circumstances are not the cause of your discontent.

Now when you look at these verses I just read, there have always been scholars who’ve been a bit critical of those verses. They say things like this: Paul gets a D-minus at expressing gratitude, I mean after all, this doesn’t sound extremely grateful, does it? It is true, when you read those verses, it does sound a bit like Paul is a little uncertain. The reason is this: Paul finds himself on the horns of a dilemma. He wants the Philippians to know how grateful he is for their gift without giving them the idea or impression that he was discontent before their gift, and he doesn’t want them to think that their gift has now made him content.

So, right after he says how glad he is to get their gift, he adds, not that I’m speaking from lack or want: I’m not grateful because of my need. You see, Paul wants them to know that he wasn’t discontent before their gift, and it’s not their gift that made him content. He wants them to know

that his contentment is unrelated to his circumstances. He was content before it arrived. He was content when it came.

There's a powerful lesson here for us: don't blame your circumstances for the fact that you crave or covet something else. For example, the husband who decides to become involved with another woman. What does he do? He convinces himself that it's not his problem: it's his wife's problem. I mean after all, if she was more affectionate, if she were more gentle, if she kept herself better, if his relationship with her was more satisfying, then he wouldn't be tempted to want someone else.

Or there's the wife who begins to find her emotional fulfillment in another man. What does she do? She convinces herself that, you know, if her husband wasn't such a Neanderthal, and that if he would take some emotional interest in her, then she would be content. Whatever it is you wish you had or had more of, whatever it is you crave, this is the lie you've told yourself: it's because of my circumstances.

Listen, it is a *lie*. If you say to yourself, if my situation was different I'd be content, you are lying to your own heart. Discontent doesn't live in our circumstances but in our hearts. That's why in James 1 (as the men and I were studying Wednesday night), James says, "... [don't let anyone] 'say when he is tempted, I'm being tempted by God.'" It's the circumstances God put me in. He says no, "each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed [how?] by his own ... [craving]. It's not your circumstances. The road to contentment begins when you and I realize that whenever we crave and covet, the issue is not and never will be our circumstances, but our sinful discontented hearts.

There's another correction we need to make to our thinking. Not only that our circumstances aren't the cause of our discontent, but we can learn to be content in *any* circumstance. Look carefully at what Paul says: "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I ... know how to live in prosperity." Notice the extremes of the first part of verse 12. "Humble means." It literally means "to be brought low". Here it's a reference to economic hardship. Listen, Paul knew about this. Turn to 1 Corinthians 4, 1 Corinthians 4:11. He says, "To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless." Paul said, there's a description of what it means to have humble means.

In 2 Corinthians 11 he makes the same point. Verse 27, he says, "*I have been* in labor ... [in]

hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.” Yeah, Paul knew what it meant to have humble means, but he said I also know what it means to have prosperity. Literally the word means “to abound, to be rich.” Here again the reference is probably to material abundance. We don’t know exactly when this was true for Paul, but that’s not the point. The point is, Paul says I’ve known poverty, and I’ve known prosperity, and I’ve learned to be content in both. What I want you to see is that contentment is a problem whether you have humble means or whether you have prosperity. You have to learn to be content in both, but here’s the key: you can.

A lot of people lie to themselves, and they say things like this: you know, if I could just get that raise, if I could just get the promotion, if I could get the bigger house, if I could get married, if I could get a better spouse (whatever it is), then I’d be content. If you want to learn to be content, you’ve got to see that contentment has nothing to do with our circumstances. You’re not discontent because you don’t make enough money: billions of people in our world make less. You’re not discontent because of your spouse: millions of people have a more difficult situation than you do. Whenever you find yourself discontent, immediately remind yourself that it has absolutely nothing to do with what is happening *to* you, and everything to do with what is happening *in* you: in the six inches between your ears. You got to fix your thinking about circumstances.

He gives us one more fix for our thinking, and that’s this: there are no perfect circumstances. There are no perfect circumstances. He makes this point in the rest of verse 12. Notice he says “I have learned the secret.” Literally that’s one Greek word; it’s the main verb of the sentence. It was used in the Greek mystery religions. When someone joined one of these mystery religions, they went through a sort of *secret initiation* where they learned all that there was to know about that particular mystery religion. They learned the “secrets” of the group. Paul says I have been initiated into the secret of those who live in contentment.

Notice the contrasts. “Being filled.” It’s an interesting Greek word. It was used of fattening animals. He’s led, I’ve learned the secret of being fattened like an animal, or on the other extreme of going hungry, of having abundance or suffering need. Now there are two ways to approach the second half of verse 12. One of them is to put it this way: Paul may just be saying the same thing he already said in verse 11, in the first half of verse 12; and that is, he’s learned to be content at both ends of the spectrum. He’s learned to be content in poverty, and he’s learned to be content in prosperity.

But I think there may be more here. Let me rephrase what Paul says. He says literally: in the context of all circumstances and in every individual circumstance, I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. In other words, it may be that Paul means that every circumstance you and I face has both a lack and an abundance, and he's learned the secret of being content with that reality. There are no perfect circumstances in this life. So, contentment is not a matter of circumstances. It's a matter of choosing to focus on what you have, and not on what you don't. In every circumstance, there is both abundance and there's lack.

Take for example, that financially, that incredibly financially wealthy person that you tend to covet what they have, that person may lack the love and family life and time you enjoy. There are no perfect circumstances. When I counsel couples (marital counseling), they're becoming discontent. And it's because they're not looking at their spouse's strengths and virtues, they're not rehearsing the positive virtues that attracted them in the first place; instead, they've chosen to dwell on those flaws that bug them.

Realize that contentment and circumstances are unrelated. If you're going to be content, you've got to understand that every circumstance you have, and every circumstance anyone in the world has, has both its advantages and its share of problems. So, the secret to contentment is not changing your circumstances, but changing that on which you choose to focus. I was illustrating this to my girls the other day. I decided to use the object lesson that many of us have used of the half-full-half-empty glass, so I went to the sink, and I took a glass, and I filled it half way. And I started to walk back to the table to sit down and sort of teach them, and then it occurred to me that's not really what most of us do, so I went back to the faucet, and I filled that sixteen ounce glass of water almost to the rim, leaving just a fraction of an inch *empty*, and then I went back to the table and sat down. And I reminded them that the water represents the blessings most people enjoy from God's hand, but when we fail to be grateful, when we nurse a discontent heart, we're choosing to focus entirely on that fraction of an inch that's empty.

There're some people that you and I have read about who are a powerful example of contentment, and that shame us, honestly. One of those for me is Fanny Crosby. We sang one of her hymns this morning: *To God Be the Glory*. Fanny Crosby wrote eight thousand songs and hymns during her lifetime. *To God Be the Glory, Blessed Assurance, Redeemed, All the Way My Savior Leads Me* – those are just a few of the ones we sing. Her songs all have this sort of this sense of joy about them. What you may not know is that Fanny Crosby could have been a very unhappy, miserable, discontent woman. Her circumstances set her up for that. Her father died

when she was very young. She had to be raised by her mother and her grandmother. And when she was just six weeks old, a careless act by a doctor left her blind for the rest of her life. Those tragic circumstances would have given most of us more than enough cause, more than enough reason for a lifetime of pity and bitterness. But in her autobiography, Fanny Crosby wrote these words: “It seemed intended by the blessed providence of God that I should be blind all my life, and I thank Him for the dispensation.”

What about the doctor who carelessly blinded her? She wrote this: “If I could meet him now, I would say thank you, thank you, over and over again for making me blind.” That blindness that most of us would have considered a terrible tragedy or even a curse, she considered to be one of her greatest blessings. She also wrote: “I could not have written thousands of hymns if I had been hindered by the distractions of seeing, seeing all the interesting and beautiful objects that would have been presented to my notice.” There’s a heart that has learned to be content regardless of the circumstances.

How can you and I develop that kind of attitude? What’s the secret? Well it’s found in the next verse. The final attitude and the secret to a contented heart is this: find your strength in Christ. Find your strength in Christ. Verse 13, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” I don’t think there’s any verse in the New Testament that has been more regularly abused than this one. It’s been commonly yanked from its context to provide the Christian with a sort of blank check: you know, you fill in what you want, and you can do it. The field goal kicker, who’s given the responsibility of making the last second game winning field goal recites this verse to himself: I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. At least one kicker yesterday must not have recited it very well. But in the context, verse 13 is the secret to living a contented life, the secret to overcoming our habits of discontent, our obsession with craving and coveting. The secret is to find our strength in the grace of Jesus Christ.

Notice the verb “I can do.” It’s an interesting Greek verb. It literally means “to be strong, to have strength, to have power.” Literally Paul says, I am strong, or I have the power for all things. This isn’t a blank check however. Paul is saying I have the power to do all the things that I’ve just described in verses 11 and 12. I have the power to be content regardless of my circumstances. How? How can you and I have the power, the strength, to be content like Paul? Notice what He says: “I can do all things.” I have the power, the strength, and then he says literally “in” not “through,” in the one who is strengthening me. You see, Paul’s contentment didn’t rise from his own inherent resources: his contentment came through the power of Jesus Christ.

You see, at its core, for us to turn from a life of coveting and craving to contentment means that we must have a change at the deepest level of our being: we must have a change in our affections, in what brings us delight. And only God can do that. So, Paul says the only way to stop coveting and craving is the same way I have learned. Here's the secret: you can only do it as the exalted Christ mightily works within you to change what you delight in. The power of Christ at work.

Paul often reminds us that this is essential. Turn back a few pages to Ephesians 6:10, that famous armor of God passage. He begins this way: "Finally, [my brothers] be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might." Listen, the only way we can make spiritual warfare against our flesh, against the cravings of our heart (that's what he's saying back in Philippians 4) is by relying on the strength that comes to us through Jesus Christ, because you are united to Jesus Christ. The moment you were saved you were put in Christ (Paul loves that expression.) You are permanently united to Jesus Christ, and through that, His power is infused into you. You can do it. You have the power to be content because of Christ and because of your connection to Him.

There's a wonderful picture of this reality that our Lord shared the last night of His life before His crucifixion. Turn back to John 15. Here's the picture of what Paul's describing; here's how we get our strength. Notice verse 4, let's go back to verse 1: "I am the true vine and My Father is the vinedresser." In verse 4 He says,

"Abide in Me, [or remain in Me] and I in you. [and] As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, [and here's the key expression] for apart from Me you can do nothing."

Can you develop a contented heart on your own? Can you, through the power of your own mental energy and determination and resolve become a contented person? The answer is absolutely not! But like Paul, you can say, I have the power, I have the strength to be contented in every circumstance *in* the one who is strengthening me.

Most of you know that when I was working my way through seminary, I worked as an electrician. I was reminded of this as I looked at this text: the one strengthening me. Most of us have a number of appliances sitting around our home in various locations. They're a great

resource, a great help. Those are some of those appliances we wouldn't have had if we'd been back in Louis the Fourteenth's day, things that we benefit from greatly. But if you unplugged those appliances, and you laid the plug down on the ground, and you tried to get them to do something, you try to get them to have the power to accomplish anything, they can do *absolutely nothing*. Turn the switch all you want. Try to motivate them all you want, and nothing will happen until you take that plug and you plug it into the power source, into the electricity. It's the flow of the power from that electrical plug, flowing ultimately from a transformer station somewhere, that gives that appliance its power to do *anything*.

And that's exactly how it is with our relationship with Jesus Christ. The only way we have the power to do anything spiritually speaking, the only way we have the power to make any spiritual advance, the only way we have the strength and power to live a contented life is to be plugged into the power source of Jesus Christ; and through His power flowing through us we can develop a contented heart.

Do you struggle with discontent? Do you find yourself often wishing you had someone else's life? someone else's circumstances? something else? Come to this passage. Ask God to convict you of your sin, and ask Him through the principles we've learned in Philippians 4, to give you a contented heart; that His power would be made strong in your weakness.

Let's pray together.

Father, I pray that You'd use Your Word, not my words Father, but Your Word in the hearts of each person here. Lord, apply this truth to our discontent hearts. Lord, help us to see that it's not our circumstances. The issue is our hearts.

And Lord, I pray that as we seek to live out the principles we've learned in this passage, as we seek to obey, Lord, do what we can't do. And that is change our delight, change our affections so that we no longer delight in those things that we don't have, but instead we delight in You, we delight in others. Lord, I pray that You would make us different than the people around us. Help us to live lives that express contentment with You and with our circumstances. And Lord we acknowledge that we can never do this on our own, that this problem is too much a part of who we are. Father, help us to learn like Paul to be content in whatever circumstances we are.

We pray in Jesus name, Amen.