

“The Secret of A Satisfying Life”

Part 7: Count It All Joy

Philippians 4:10-13



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One of the songs that was popular in my youth was the song “I can’t get no satisfaction.” Remember that song? Thirty years later we still hear that as a common complaint. All the time we meet people who are unhappy, unfilled, and unsatisfied, because this is an age of discontent. People are looking everywhere for something to satisfy them. Now if you were to believe what the commercials tell you than you would believe that contentment is something that can be rolled on, sprayed on, inhaled, eaten or driven—as if all these products will give you lasting contentment. Yet they don’t. So what is the secret of a satisfying life? What is the secret of contentment?

Today is the last of an seven week series on the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Philippians—a series that we have called “Count It All Joy.” And the verses we will be looking at today are really a summary of what Paul has shared with us over and over again in his letter. As we look at what Paul considers the secret of a satisfying life—the secret of contentment, let’s read together his words from Philippians Ch.4, vs. 11 and 12, “. . . I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation.”

Now what is contentment? Well, it’s not apathy. It’s not laziness. And it’s not complacency. Contentment is independence from circumstances. In other words you don’t base your happiness on the situation around you. Your happiness comes from within. Now how do you get that kind of contentment? How do you get that kind of satisfaction in life? Notice what Paul says. He says, “I have learned to be content. I have learned the secret . . .” Contentment is learned. Paul is not saying, “I’ve always been content.” He is saying, “I have learned it.” And this is not something we can instantly learn in a one time experience. Life is a school of learning about contentment, and the problem is that most people never learn and they die unfulfilled, unsatisfied, and unhappy. And so how do you learn about contentment? In our Scripture passage this morning Paul gives us four lessons that can help us experience real contentment and find a satisfying, abundant life.

The first lesson is— learn to avoid comparisons. Learn to avoid comparisons, because comparing yourself to others always leads to discontent. Vs. 11b, “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.” And that comes from not comparing yourself. Have you ever gone and looked at model homes and then gone home to your shack? You know what I am talking about? If you want to learn to be content, you’ve got to avoid comparisons. You see, there will always be people who make more money than you do, who have greater opportunities than you have, who have fewer problems . . . so what! That has no bearing at all on your personal happiness. So stop comparing yourself with others.

Let me share three misconceptions about happiness. The first misconception is this. I must have what others have to be happy. Have your kids ever say this, “But mom, everybody has got one of these. Everybody else has one, so I’ve got to have one.” That’s the myth behind all fads and all fashions, and it’s just not true. The second myth is— I must be liked by everyone in order to be happy. You don’t, you know. Many people spend so much time trying to win the approval of others. But the fact is that you can’t go through life without some disapproval. If you do anything someone isn’t going to like it. Even Jesus couldn’t please everybody. You can’t please everybody, and you don’t need everyone’s approval to be happy. The third misconception about happiness is this: Having more will make me more happy. That’s not true either. Someone once asked the billionaire, Howard Hughes, “How much money does it take to make a person happy?” And he said, “Just a little more.”

Let’s look at these verses from I Timothy 6 “. . . There is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, it is certain that we take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these.” Paul is saying that we all came into this world with nothing and we’re all going to leave with nothing. We’re not going to take anything with us. You never see a hearse with a U-Haul behind it, do you? All possessions are temporary. They are just loaned to us for a short time. So there is no need to compare ourselves with others in anyway.

There is a second lesson we need to learn if we want to be satisfied in life. We must learn to adjust to change. Life is full of ups and downs. Ups and downs emotionally, ups and downs physically, mentally, financially. You may be on top of the world this week, and then down in the dumps next week. You may hit a home run this week, and next week you may strike out. There is nothing certain in life except this— change. Change is certain. So the question becomes, “How well do you handle change? How do you handle it when things get shaken up a bit?” Do you get frightened? Do you get moody? Do you get angry or uptight? How do you handle change?

Paul is saying that one of the secrets of learning to be content in life is the ability to adjust to all kinds of circumstances and change. Our happiness in life will depend on our ability to adapt, to adjust, to be flexible, because change is going to happen no matter what. Look again at what Paul says in vs. 12: “I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.”

Paul is saying, “I’ve seen it all — good times and bad times — I’ve run the gamete — from poverty to prosperity and back.” What did this kind of experience teach Paul? He says, “I have learned to be independent of circumstances.” That is the secret of a satisfying life. We can’t get our happiness out of people, possessions, pleasures, popularity, prestige or profits. Paul says, “I have learned to be independent of circumstances.” Remember when Paul writes these words he is in a Roman prison. He is lonely, cold, and old. Yet he is saying, “I can cope. I can handle this. No matter what I go through, I am not victim. And no matter what people do to me, they are not going to control my life. Because I am independent of circumstances.” Now that is real freedom, to not be controlled by our circumstances, or to not be manipulated by the external things in our lives.

Have you ever heard someone respond to the question how are you doing? Like this — “Well, I’m OK under the circumstances.” What are you doing under them? Circumstances were never meant to be something we get under. We don’t have to live there. That’s a choice. We need to get on top of circumstances. There are three kinds of circumstances in life. There are circumstances that we can control and we do. There are many things in life that we have control over. There are also many circumstances we can control and we don’t. We don’t have a job, but we don’t do anything to look for one. And finally there are circumstances that we can’t control and there are many of these in life. And that’s where we need contentment — in uncontrollable circumstances — in things that our beyond our power. We have done the best we could, and it is still out of our hands. That’s where we need to relax and trust God.

The third lesson in learning to be content is to learn to draw on Christ’s power. Instead of just depending on my own efforts to make it through circumstances and my own energy, I must learn to draw on Christ’s power. Philippians 4:13 is one of my most favorite verses in the whole Bible. Let’s read it together. “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” That means you can handle it when your kids are bouncing off the walls. That means you can make it through the stock market crash. That means you can handle it when you have problems up to here and you don’t know where to go. I can handle everything Paul says. I can cope. Why? Because he had an external power source. He was depending not on his own power, but on God’s power. Now how do you know if you are depending on your power, rather than God’s power? Well, for one, you get tired. Are you tired this morning? Fatigue comes from living life on your own resources, rather than on the resources of God.

Look at this same verse in the Jerusalem Bible. Paul says, “There is nothing I cannot master with the help of the one who gives me strength.” Think for a moment about your own life. What in your life do you need to master? What in your life do you need to get control over? Do you need to get control of your time? Do you need to get control of your temper? Do you need to get control of a bad habit? Paul says, “I can master anything with the help of Christ who gives me strength.” This verse has strengthened me hundreds and hundreds of times in situations in which I have felt overwhelmed.

Now some of you may be facing a big problem this week — one that you’re going to face head on. Paul says, “You can handle it. You can face it with confidence in the power of Christ who will give you strength.” The word strength in this verse in Greek is *dunamis*. It is the word from which we get the words “dynamic” or “dynamo.” Dynamo is something that gives continuous energy. So Paul is saying, “Jesus Christ is the dynamo of my life. He gives continuous energy. I am confident and capable to cope with the circumstances of life because I draw on Christ’s power.”

Now there is one more lesson. The fourth lesson to a contented life is, learn to trust God to meet our needs. That is the secret of contentment in life.

In vs. 19 Paul says, “And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” In the Bible there are over 6,000 promises of ways God wants to meet our needs. But many of you can’t access those promises because you don’t really understand all that God wants to do in your life.

But I can guarantee you that if you put God first in your life — at the center of your life — God will take care of your needs. Now the real reason that people are unsatisfied and unfilled and unhappy is because God is not the center of their lives, and they are looking for fulfillment in all the wrong places. And they run from this to that, to this, to that looking for something that is going to satisfy them. And they move from relationship to relationship, and from job to job, from hobby and sports and recreation to the next thing, and from books to seminars looking for the key. But they forget that they are made with a God-shaped vacuum in their lives, and nothing else is going to fill that void, except God. So when you try to find satisfaction in life through possessions or through people or through pleasures or through popularity or through achievement or through any thing in life — they don’t last. Discontent just means that God is not the center of our lives. When we are not contented it means that we are looking to something else.

Now I believe that God wants us to have happy, fulfilling, satisfying lives. Jesus said, “I have come that you may have life, and have it abundantly.” Life to the fullest is what God wants us to have, but the way we have that satisfaction in life is by learning the lessons of contentment we have looked at today. By first, learning the foolishness of comparing ourselves to others; second, by learning to adjust to change; third, by learning to draw on Christ’s power, and fourth, by learning to trust God to meet all our needs. Which of these four lessons do you need to learn or maybe relearn in your life today? I encourage you to ask God to help you apply these four lessons to every situation that you face, so that you can say with Paul, “I can cope. I am sufficient in Christ’s sufficiency. Through his strength I can do all things.” And then as Christ’s power and strength in your life becomes evident, may you give God the glory now and forever. Amen.