

Finding Contentment

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I'm going to jump right into the topic today, which is "Contentment". I think most of us have an idea of what contentment looks like and what it is. We have a deck on the back of our house. Some people have been there and have shared that deck with us. We used to have in-home Bible studies. On the back of our deck—it's a covered deck and very nice—it's our little escape pod from the world. Especially as the weather gets warmer. Marie did see a robin this morning in our maple tree so that's a good sign of spring.

We went to one of those home decor shop and bought a patio sign that hangs by a rope and has a series of planks on it, each with a different thing written on it. This is how it reads. The heading is "Deck Rules"—what we are supposed to follow when we are out there.

Take a nap—I've done that before. We have a little cocker spaniel and she spends a lot of time out there too. I've taken a nap out there with her sitting on my chest. We have a swing and I use it as a hammock. The next little board says,

Feel the breeze, read a book—I do that a lot, more as I get older and I'm an avid reader. When I sit down to read a book, I find myself falling asleep. The next one is:

Sip a drink —For us, in our case, that would be a glass of wine or maybe a beer. Sometimes we'll split a beer. That's pretty much what our alcohol consumption is these days. The next little board says:

Relax and unwind—Kind of decompress and listen to the birds. We have quite a lot of wildlife. We had some resident doves so when we are sitting on our deck, we hear a lot of cooing going on. The last one is:

Look at the stars—It's a covered deck so we can't see too much of that but if we step out into the lawn, we can see the stars.

The point I'm trying to make is, any of those are what we generally called contentment in the moment and that's a good thing. That's our usual idea of what contentment is. As most of us know, it's a fleeting commodity in today's world. Sometimes we can carve out that little space and time that we can have a little physical contentment. But what does scripture say when it talks about being content? The title for the message today is:

Finding Contentment

I know preparation for a sermon is a lot easier for other people than it is for me. Gordon can ease right into it and whip out a sermonette. What we do sometimes is experiment

with different titles and one of the first titles I thought of when I started looking at the topic of contentment was, elusive contentment, because it is elusive. To my surprise when I started looking into Bible helps, that topic is missing. It's just not there. I did surprisingly enough find the topic in a topical Bible software I have. That came up with 42 direct and indirect references to contentment. We'll get into what that means in the Greek a little later.

We all know that a contented mind and outlook is really hard to find in this hectic world right now. It's difficult. You might ask yourself, how many people do you know that are actually content? I've been reading a book lately title, *Happiness is a Serious Problem*, and that goes along with the topic. The authors are writing about things that are going on in the world—conditions in the world—which affect everyone. For most of us, even in the church, it's really hard to find someone who is happy and content. That's because of the influence that our environment has on us. That's just the way it is.

I remember one time, as I was thinking about this topic, about how you can remember someone across someone in your past who was content. As I was thinking about this topic, I remembered that one time my father was visiting a couple who he knew—they were a black couple—who lived along an irrigation ditch in a shack. They had a dirt floor. I was probably about 9 or 10 years old—that makes it about 75 years ago. They were the most gentle, kindest, calmest people and I still remember that to this day. There was just a peace in that house. They were poor—they were the poorest people I think I've ever known. Even in the military, I've been to a lot of places around the world and have seen some poor places, but these folks were very, very poor. It was just so pleasant to be in that house and around them. It's very elusive—a rare commodity. Both in a normal and in a deeper sense. We'll get into that. It's not just something you can grab a hold of.

When you talk about contentment, that's an abstract. It takes place on the inside. It's primarily a state of mind, as we'll get to later in the sermon. Abstract in the sense of you "can't"—I have made a list of bullets on where you *can't* find it.

- *You can't buy it in a bottle.* I like this advertisement you see on the TV all the time; you can get your fruits and vegetables in a capsule form. That's a bunch of dehydrated powder. It's 99% hype and 1% substance.
- *You can't get a prescription for it.* It doesn't count that if you can get something that puts you in a euphoric stupor, that doesn't really count for contentment. In my past I had a very sad story about a lady that I knew—it seemed to be the practice among doctors back then—they put her on valium and she became addicted to that. The poor lady, that valium was something they prescribed to treat anxiety. It might treat anxiety but that's not contentment.

Similarly

- *You can't go to a pot shop and buy it and smoke it.* I have to laugh a little, we have a pot shop about a stone's throw from a Baptist church which is about a half mile from us.
- *You can't get it in a tube and massage it on your skin, like for sore muscles or joints.* It doesn't come that way.
- *You can't go to a restaurant and say you would like a double order of contentment with pickles and cheese.*
- *You can't Professor Google it or find something on YouTube where someone has a remedy, where they can give you some contentment.*
- *You can't click a new document on your computer and type in contentment, you're just going to get a blank page.* The ultimate disappointment—to me it's just beyond anything that we can imagine, so you can't find an app for it. That was so disappointing.

I'm being silly as usual. I'll bet you there is someone somewhere working on it. You can probably get a whole list on Pinterest about contentment but that's not really contentment. My theory is that someday you will have about 1000 apps that you can tap into on your TV or iPhone.

Getting back to the point. Contentment is very rare. The question that automatically comes to us is, why is that? Why is contentment such a rare thing in society today? If you're like me and like this subject, the first thing I'll do is start researching it. If you want to find out about a particular topic you go to people who write about that. People who write about the societal trends that we see all around us all the time. One of those authors that I'm not sure if you're familiar with, is Richard Swinson. He's an M.D. and I have a few of his books. I like the way he writes, which is from a conservative Christian viewpoint. He traces the lack of contentment in modern society back to human progress historically. I'm just guessing—it doesn't say so in his bio that is usually on the back page of a book. As an MD, I think he sees the mental health effect that a lack of contentment has on his patients. I'm sure in his practice he doesn't see a lot of contentment, peace and tranquility in his patients; it's just not there. I kind of like his logic. He uses a graph that makes it very visual. He uses a simple line graph. He has a vertical line on one side, a flat line and then he shows a line as human kind has historically progressed—you'll see a few blips in there, very few, like the flood, The Tower of Babel—he doesn't say that in his book. According to his graph, progress flat lined or plateaued, if you will, for about 5000 years. Things from about 31 BC to 1750 A.D. things start to change. They begin to accelerate. The industrial revolution came along. It arrived on the scenes starting about 1750 but it goes on for a couple hundred years. He illustrates by bullet lists of this progress. The first one is the steam engine that came along. From that came the locomotive, the steam boat, travel and the world got a little bit smaller for mankind. The cotton gin was invented and so was the power loom.

Manufacturing took a boost. Then the electric motor and with the electric motor in a couple of hundred years' timeframe it powered everything. Converting electric energy to mechanical energy. Then we have oil wells that came along and producing oil and fueling everything. Of course we want to shut all that down today. My theory is that God gave us the earth and the elements in it to use. I try to stay apolitical.

Then the telegraph came along—the telephone, the lightbulb, diesel engine, wireless radio and dynamite thanks to a Swedish chemist Mr. Alfred Nobel. Then the airplane later on, the automobile came along and mass production happened. Then things really took off. All of this took about 250 years, from about 1750 on. Then you come down to our day and age—the last 30 or 40 years. That production line going across that graph goes vertical. There's a quote from an author—his book is Contentment—he does a very good treatment of the topic. Quoting him, Dr. Swinson says:

Over the past quarter century (he wrote this about 2013, so 10 or 11 years ago, so a little bit dated) history suddenly exploded and threw us off our trajectory. We jumped the tracks and careened into the unknown. For better or worse we find ourselves in the midst of an epic transition. The old patterns appear broken, the world is now a different place and is not playing by the rules. Without warning progress went vertical, heading straight for the stratosphere. We are locked in an acceleration track and somehow can't escape. The entire globe seems to be making it up as we go along.

There is a lot of insight there. We're not even mentioning the effect all of this material progress—so called progress—has had on society in general. The family institution, politics, government, economics—everything. It's massive when you think about it. It took about that long for human history to go along and then suddenly all of this came along. The point I'm trying to make is, it has all had an effect on us physically, mentally, and spiritually.

In all of this progress—he points out—we have been inundated with things that are described by a four-letter word. I'll mention the one I mean in a bit. Time for some scriptures. If you'll turn to 1 Timothy 6:1-10, we will lay the groundwork for the rest of the sermon. The context here is Paul giving instruction to Timothy regarding conduct in the church in his day but of course those principles apply to us today as well. I'll be using the NLT. It's a little bit clearer for us today.

1 Timothy 6:1 *All slaves should show full respect for their masters so they will not bring shame on the name of God and his teaching.*

2) If the masters are believers, that is no excuse for being disrespectful. Those slaves should work all the harder because their efforts are helping other believers who are well loved. Teach these things, Timothy, and encourage everyone to obey them. (NLT)

The point there is being a Godly example no matter who you are or where you are; our examples count.

3) Some people may contradict our teaching, but these are the wholesome teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. (NLT)

That's how He taught. We have the beatitudes where Christ taught us to be different, change your carnal thinking, change your carnal behaviors.

3) continued)

... These teachings promote a godly life.

4) Anyone who teaches something different is arrogant and lacks understanding. Such a person has an unhealthy desire to quibble over the meaning of words. This stirs up arguments ending in jealousy, division, slander, and evil suspicions. (NLT)

We've had experience with all of that in the church. That's probably been the state of the church for as long as we can remember. Starting probably back in the early '70's.

5) These people always cause trouble. Their minds are corrupt, and they have turned their backs on the truth. To them, a show of godliness is just a way to become wealthy. (NLT)

There it's contrasting godliness with materialism. Not surprisingly, many religions use religion as a prop.

6) Yet true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. (NLT)

I think about Paul being very well versed in the Old Testament, and with some of the meaning of that verse he may have been thinking of just a couple reference scriptures. The first one is Psalm 37:16, from the NLT where it says *"It's better to be godly and have little than to be evil and rich."* The other one is Proverbs 15:16, *"Better to have little with fear for Yehovah than to have great treasure and inner turmoil."*

What is that inner turmoil? Discontentment. Back to 1 Timothy.

7) After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave it.

8) So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content.

9) But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction.

10) For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows. (NLT)

That's what coveting does, causes evil. It's never enough, wanting more and more. I remember one a financial advisor saying—I used to listen to a financial talk show host—

a lot of times when someone dies and everyone gets together, the claws come out because they are talking about the leftover stuff. The money and whatever else. Getting at the aforementioned word, “more”. That is the word I’m thinking of—that four-letter word. Hollywood loves that as well as other four-letter words. They love that one because they love to produce *more* violence, *more* pornography, and *more* profanity. Getting back to the reference material from the author, he made a bullet list of “*more*”. What society—he’s referencing what has brought us to this point in human history and why we don’t have contentment, why we don’t have peace and those things in our life we would like to have and don’t. He says a lot of it has to do with the word *more*. He has a very long list; I’ve shortened it up. Here are some of the things that progress has given us.

1. More technology
2. More information
3. More news
4. More choices
5. More computers
6. More email
7. More social media
8. More decisions
9. More possessions—stuff.

Remember that parable in Luke 12 about the rich man who built bigger barns to store *more* stuff. The point of that—the lesson of that parable—is possessions don’t give life meaning. That’s not what gives life meaning. Possessions, when you think about it, can become an imbalance, scripture even talks about that in other places. Going on with the bullet list.

10. More cell phones

Remember he’s talking 10-11 years ago, look at it now. You can’t drive anywhere. It’s against the law to text and use your phone while driving but you see everyone doing it.

11. More activities
12. More expectations
13. That activity in turn gives us more stress. Physiological, psychological—it’s taking its toll, all of this stuff, all of this more.
14. More imbalance
15. More hurry
16. More clutter
17. More debt—keeping up with all the stuff.

I knew someone who I think was in between jobs, they were using their credit cards—living off their plastic. People get caught wherever they’re at. They didn’t have one or two or three or four or five credit cards maxed out, they had 15 maxed out. I can only imagine the interest and the time it takes to pay that back.

18. More anxiety
19. More overload
20. More burnout

And all of this gives us more stuff.

21. More weaponry
22. More shootings
23. More predators—crime.

What is it? 35 cities and growing that aren't even safe to live in. They don't even recommend you go visit there—our nation's capital. I think almost all the people with any power or influence have bodyguards. They probably don't even go out at night. The limos they get chauffeured around in are bullet proof.

24. More fear
25. More paranoia

That's all generated by all this progress.

26. More anti-depressants
27. More obesity
28. More insomnia
29. More terrorism
30. More fast food
31. More diabetes
32. More illicit drugs
33. More pornography

Believe me, I've trimmed this list way, way down. You get the point though as to why *contentment* has fallen on hard times. That's why it's so elusive. All these things are taking up our energy, our time, our needs. Somehow, we get into this mode where we need stuff. The author writes from a Christian point of view but he doesn't mention Satan being in the mix, but of course he is. Satan uses that and entices us to want more and more to keep us unsettled. Anything to knock us off that path that God has called us to and that will sure do it. Let's turn to Proverbs 30. You appreciate the Bible examples we have that teach us the wisdom of not falling into the trap of *more and more*. Again, I'll be using the NLT. The context is *trust* and *dependence* on God.

Proverbs 30:5 *Every word of God proves true. He is a shield to all who come to him for protection.*

6) *Do not add to his words, or he may rebuke you and expose you as a liar.*

7) *O God, I beg two favors from you; let me have them before I die.*

8) *First, help me never to tell a lie.* (NLT)

That's talking about personal integrity because in the end, that's all you have. No matter anything else that you may have.

8 continued) ... Second, give me neither poverty nor riches! Give me just enough to satisfy my needs.

9) For if I grow rich, I may deny you and say, "Who is the Lord?" And if I am too poor, I may steal and thus insult God's holy name. (NLT)

Breaking God's commandments—that same principle is echoed in Hebrews 13, from the Amplified.

Hebrews 13:5 *Let your character or moral disposition be free from love of money [including greed, avarice, lust, and craving for earthly possessions] and be satisfied with your present [circumstances and with what you have]; for He [God] Himself has said, I will not in any way fail you [nor give you up nor leave you without support. [I will] not, [I will] not, [I will] not in any degree leave you helpless nor forsake nor let [you] down (or relax My hold on you)! [Assuredly not!]* (AMP)

He's actually referencing Joshua 1:5 and you might also compare Deuteronomy 1:6. Joshua 1:5 from the New King James—this is just a reference.

Joshua 1:5 *No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you.* (NKJV)

The whole story there is Joshua standing under the threshold of entering the Promised Land. God says He will be with him. I won't belabor the point, but there is a whole lot of scripture warning us to be different in our thinking from the world around us in general. The world as we know, as pointed out, takes great stock in riches and the accumulating of "stuff". Just for the sake of having more and more. Don't get me wrong, there's nothing wrong with having some stuff. We own a home, a couple of vehicles—things like that. Money has no intrinsic value. It's just a means to take care of yourself and your family. Getting back to contentment. What does the Bible tell us about contentment and does it give us any hope of actually finding it? I believe that it does.

Let's look at an example of someone who actually found contentment and why and how he found it—how he acquired it. That's the Apostle Paul— a little background on Paul. around the time of Jesus, when he was about 8 years old and working in his father's carpenter shop or maybe building houses, we don't know. That's what carpenters did back then. They did stonework, they did everything. Jesus had calluses on his hands, he had muscles on his arms. If you have ever watched some of these carpenters working on houses—my father was a carpenter, I was not—these guys are pretty hard men. They're not snowflakes, as some would say. He was working in that shop with his father in the trade.

About 275 miles north of Nazareth, in Tarsis, along the southern border of Turkey, Paul's mother was giving birth. Then later Paul, about 12 years of age, traveled to Jerusalem to attend Gamaliel's prestigious school to live and study there. He was then about 65 miles south of Nazareth. Of course, they never met until later on, on the road to Damascus and we know that whole story. He was turned from being a vicious prosecutor to being persecuted for the very same faith. Go to Acts 20 and break into the story of Paul's lot in life. We'll learn some things as we go through Paul's life. I'll be reading verse 22-25. This very touching account is his last meeting with the elders at Ephesus. It's very touch when you read between the lines. Almost heartbreaking in a way. This is from the NLT.

Acts 20:22 *And now I am bound by the Spirit^[f] to go to Jerusalem. I don't know what awaits me,
23) except that the Holy Spirit tells me in city after city that jail and suffering lie ahead.* (NLT)

You mean Paul, this great apostle is facing prison and suffering? I have to contrast this, with leaders today who adopt a grand lifestyle. Lavish home, tailormade suits, limo service everywhere they go, luxury, business jets, 5-star accommodation, VIP treatment wherever they go. It used to always get me, even when I didn't know any better, that from the pulpit, someone would compare their ministry to Paul's. To me they didn't have enough scars. They didn't have the right to make that comparison.

24) But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God. (NLT)

James recently talked about that. The work is what people need to change and they have to get that God used human instruments to convey that.

25) "And now I know that none of you to whom I have preached the Kingdom will ever see me again. (NLT)

It's a very emotional parting. Remember he said jail and suffering lay ahead of me—that as his future. Turn to Philippians 4 and capture some more of Paul's life. I'll be reading verse 10-12. There were people who cared about Paul. They were worried about him and concerned.

Philippians 4:10 *How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me [they had no means to do that], but you didn't have the chance to help me.
11) Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content [satisfied—that's what that word means in the Greek] with whatever I have.* (NLT)

Remember he was in chains, in prison, when he wrote this Epistle.

12) *I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. (NLT)*

Then pick up a little more of that in 2 Corinthians 4:17, breaking into the context here. From the New King James.

2 Corinthians 4:17 *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory ... (NKJV)*

I have to look at that and just marvel. He's saying that he learned contentment through light affliction. If you look at the record of Paul's light affliction and it's legendary. Here's a list of those afflictions. He was condemned to die, he was a spectacle to everyone, regarded as a fool—you remember that account in Acts 17 on Mars hill with Areopagus where the intelligentsia of Athens call him "a babbler". He was just a fool to them. Going down the list here of his light afflictions. He was called weak, ineffective, small in stature, dishonored, hungry, thirsty, in rags, brutally treated, homeless, cursed, persecuted, slandered, scum of the earth, refuse of the world, hard pressed on every side, perplexed, persecuted, struck down, always given over to death, outwardly wasting away, flogged severely—remember 5 times—exposed to death again and again. Three times beaten with rods. You talk about torture; when you're beaten with rods—with a club, it's someone going for the muscles, to bruise the muscles and going for the joints to damage the joints—beating with rods is torture. Once stoned, three times shipwrecked, spent a night and a day in the open sea, constantly on the move, in dangerous rivers—no bridges where he went—in danger from bandits, from countrymen, from the Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the country—sounds like modern America. In danger at sea, in danger from false brethren, going without sleep, has known hunger and thirst, going without food, been cold and naked and stoned. Have you noticed some redundancy here? That's because it happened more than once. Dragged outside the city, stripped and beaten, severely flogged, thrown into prison, dragged from the Temple and arrested—numerous times—bound in chains, taken into the barracks along with some pretty abusive soldiers, if you remember that. Flogged with troubles and hardships often, distressed, beatings, imprisonments, riots, sleepless nights, hunger, regarded as an imposter, beaten, sorrowful, poor, having nothing—he was destitute. That's just taken from 7 chapters.

That's the list from 7 chapters in the New Testament. What was Paul learning from all of this? Referring back to where he said he learned to be content. If you look at the Greek definition—this is from The Work Study Dictionary by Zodhiates—James references this often—it's Strong's #842 if you want to look that up. *Content* in the Greek means "self-sufficient in a good sense; sufficient; adequate"; as used in the Greek, "satisfied with one's lot". A synonym would be "satisfactory". You could even add peace in there—there's all kinds of things that intertwine with that whole concept of contentment. You see those words crop up again and again with this topic. We'll look at a few of those scriptures. If you think about that, the implication of what Paul learned was sufficient, it was satisfactory, it was adequate, it was enough for him. His total trust and confidence

were in God the Father. The Son supplied everything he needed to endure all of those things we just listed. All the trials he faced. He says that—let’s revisit—Philippians 4:11-13.

Philippians 4:11 *Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have.*

12) *I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little.*

13) *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.* (NLT)

If you look up that word *strength* it means “power”. In other words, his secret to contentment was to rely on God’s help—looking to God, through Christ who empowered him with what he needed to face the outcome of everything he had to endure. When you think about that—no matter what Paul was enduring, no matter what we have to endure—God already knows the outcome. Let’s look at 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 from the English Standard Version. The context here is another of Paul’s afflictions. He not only had all those things from the outside happening to him, he had things from the inside happening that God allowed.

2 Corinthians 12:7 *So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations [remember he was used to write 13 of the 27 New Testament epistles and he was prominent in 3/4 of the chapters in Acts; God used him in many ways], a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.*

8) *Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.*

9) *But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

10) *For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.* (ESV)

The point was, Paul learned that his own strength, his own resources, didn’t get him very far. There’s a huge lesson there for us too. Who hasn’t tried to do things without seeking God’s help. I can figure this out, I can do this. I’m smart, I’m educated, maybe I have a PhD. The point is, just like Paul, sometimes we have to suffer to learn that we can’t do that. We can try—God will let us; He won’t stop us. Another thing we can learn from Paul is in 2 Corinthians 4. Paul talks about before conversion, he and like all of us, had a veil over our minds. We couldn’t understand or see anything about God. The context is, they liken that to a light coming on in our minds and us finally seeing; being lifted from the darkness. The darkness that Satan has put on all of our minds and actually put on the minds of all the world.

2 Corinthians 4:7 *We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars [I think the King James says earthen vessels] containing*

this great treasure [of course the great treasure is God's gospel, God's truth]. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.

8) We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair.

9) We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed.

10) Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies.

11) Yes, we live under constant danger of death because we serve Jesus, so that the life of Jesus will be evident in our dying bodies. (NLT)

And we're all going to die.

12) So we live in the face of death, but this has resulted in eternal life for you.

13) But we continue to preach because we have the same kind of faith the psalmist had when he said, "I believed in God, so I spoke." [He's quoting Psalm 116:10]

14) We know that God, who raised the Lord Jesus, will also raise us with Jesus and present us to himself together with you. (NLT)

You might say that's God's whole plan in a nutshell.

15) All of this is for your benefit. And as God's grace reaches more and more people, there will be great thanksgiving, and God will receive more and more glory. (NLT)

It's all to God the Father and Christ's honor and glory.

16) That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day.

17) For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! (NLT)

What he's saying in all that—sometimes Paul doesn't get right to the point—is there's something far beyond this life, no matter what we go through.

18) So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever. (NLT)

Over in Hebrews 13, this one verse here, verse 14. When you speak about the secret that he had, to be content, to be satisfied with what he had, he had what God had given him was enough. In all that he saw far beyond this earthly life. He knew this earthly life wasn't the end, as we do. We tend to forget that.

Hebrews 13:14 *For this world is not our permanent home [other translations say “city”]; we are looking forward to a home yet to come. (NLT)*

Paul knew everything was temporary. We picture that in one of the Feasts of the year, don't we? Temporary dwellings. The instructions to the Israelites were to gather leaves and branches from various trees and construct booths to dwell in for 7 days. The point was to show them that the world they live in was temporary, symbolizing the fact that Yehovah has a future dwelling place for all mankind—that's what that really pictures. That's to be revealed in a later time as many scriptures show. In Nehemiah 8—we won't turn over there—but a little bit of what's there is the famous Water Gate chapter. When Nehemiah was re-introducing the feast of booths. There, many people constructed booths and put them on top of their houses and kept the feast for 7 days. It's kind of interesting, I read a couple of Hebrew Jewish authors and it's interesting the way they look at this. The English translation is *tabernacles*, that comes from a Latin word which means “tent”. That Hebrew word can also mean “hut”. The way they look at it, it's like a brush hut and they would put that on their roofs when Nehemiah was reintroducing the laws of God to the people and they would sleep under that hut at night. That's how they would observe that.

I heard another interesting comparison. They looked at it like it was an arbor. When you think of “arbor”, you think of weddings where there is an arbor made out of brush. Sometimes they have flowers and decorations on it. It's constructed that way. These of course would be deeper and a little longer for a person to sit or lay down in. When you look at the symbolism of an arbor that's used at a wedding, the bride and the groom pass through that to a new life, a new commitment, so there is some symbolism there. All of those things symbolize—all the scriptures—that the human condition is a temporary state.

So, distilling the concept of “contentment” down, we can see it has at least two elements in achieving it and finding it (as we've seen in these scriptures and there's so many more scriptures):

First, recognizing, trusting, and having total trust in God and in His Holy Spirit. His power in every aspect of our lives to see us through these things, no matter what, like Paul, we are faced with.

Things happen to us all the time. The one thing that Paul discovered is, he could choose the way he viewed things. He could choose his perspective and the way he looked at things, with God's help. I learned a lesson on this—just the way to look at things. A number of years ago we attended a memorial for someone and I heard something that was a life lesson—a very simple thing. It's meant a lot. It was at a Lutheran church, there were a lot of people there; 500-600 people. The place was full, people were standing in the back wherever they could stand. The minister or the priest—I don't know what the Lutheran's call themselves—he was telling this story about this man. The memorial was over, he had already passed. We knew the individual, he was a very good acquaintance of ours, he was actually a doctor and we

were patients of his. He had some kind of an incurable condition, but I never knew what it was. The priest said to him, "People are asking about you, they are concerned so what should I tell them?" His response was a very simple thing. He said tell people not to worry, and that I'm okay. He knew God was with him—at least in his understanding—He was not abandoning him. I think the, "Don't worry, I'm okay." is pretty profound. You could apply that to everything Paul went through. He was content, he was satisfied. Whatever God put him through, he knew there was a future and he said,

"I'm okay. I'm okay with whatever God is putting me through.
I'm okay with the way God is working with me right now."

It's the same way with all of us. God's plan is to have all of us in His Kingdom. He calls each one of us wherever we are at in life. He does put us through things to try and test us. But He holds out that promise to us. That's basically what Paul was telling the Philippians. That was his most loved church. They weren't a high maintenance church like the Corinthians and others. What he was telling them was, no matter what the circumstances, no matter my condition, no matter what I'm in, don't worry about me. He told the Philippian brethren, "I'm okay."

I know to some that may sound fatalistic or just resignation. It's really not, it's all about perspective and how we look at things. We too, can tap into God's help, we know that. God says He's not far from any of us at any time. He can help us see things the way He does.

I would like to spend the rest of the sermon on some practical applications in being content. I'd like to cover that in 3 points.

1. Be content or satisfied with our calling.

I mean that in the context of where we find ourselves in the world today. Let's look at 1 Corinthians 1:25-29, looking at things the way God looks at things. I'm breaking in on the context.

1 Corinthians 1:25 *This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength.*
(NLT)

That's a sharp contrast between man's puny strength and God's.

26) Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you. (NLT)

I remember back when we were first married, we bought a home that had been a rental home. \$300 down, \$72 per month, 5.25% interest for 30 years, you can figure that out. We paid an awful lot for that old house. We had a used Chevy, maybe 9 or 10 years old. A bunch of hand-me-down furniture because we couldn't afford anything, we didn't have

anything. But we had each other and we were blissfully happy. I guess we were just too dumb to know we didn't need more.

27) Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless [that's us in our carnal condition and state] to shame those who are powerful. (NLT)

I heard a joke one time that the difference between God and virologist, is God doesn't think He's a virologist.

28) God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. (NLT)

You can think about the endless acquisition of stuff.

29) As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God. (NLT)

Just a few things, wrapping up point one. God called each of us now. Not later, not at a different time, not at another junction in history. Just like He chose Paul, He chose the apostles, He chose the early brethren, the early church. All with a purpose. He never changes. He called us at the right time, it's not accidental. God didn't make a mistake. Some have tried to claim that. I've seen people in the past, folks that resented being called now. They didn't like it. In the past it was especially hard for young people who were pressured into being baptized. They wanted to enjoy life and do their thing for a while. Be content with our calling, it's enough when you think about it.

2. Be content knowing everything is temporary.

We talked about that a little bit. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.

2 Corinthians 4:16 *That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day.*

17) For our present troubles are small and won't last very long [that's in comparison to our future]. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!

18) So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever. (NLT)

Over in Philippians 3, again from the NLT. This is Paul's favorite church. I think he maybe talks a little more heart to heart with them than some of the other churches. I'm going to try to read down to verse 21.

Philippians 3:1 *Whatever happens, my dear brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. (NLT)*

I don't have time to list the scriptures here, but Paul has talked more about joy than any other writer in the New Testament. Look at all he went through—all of the suffering—yet he talked more about joy than any of them.

1 continued) ... I never get tired of telling you these things, and I do it to safeguard your faith.

2) Watch out for those dogs, those people who do evil, those mutilators who say you must be circumcised to be saved.

3) For we who worship by the Spirit of God are the ones who are truly circumcised [of course he's talking about circumcision of the heart]. We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort,

4) though I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more!

5) I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. (NLT)

I believe he had dual citizenship too; he was also a Roman citizen.

6) I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault. [He thought]

7) I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done.

8) Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ ... (NLT)

In his thinking. I think back to that scripture with Christ saying, He didn't come to do His will, He came to do the will of the Father. Their thinking was one. That's a place where God wants our thinking. Might be hard to get there.

9) and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; (NLT)

How many times have you seen people try to gin up righteousness, thinking they were achieving salvation by the things that they do rather than simple dependence on God and what God says is righteous.

9 continued) ... rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith.

10) I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death,

11) so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead! (NLT)

Paul saw far beyond his present trouble. He knew they were all temporary. What a perspective, what a place to be.

12) I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me.

13) No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead ... (NLT)

Therein lies his secret. Looking ahead. Not just at all the trouble or all the things that he had to deal with. Skipping ahead here a little bit, verse 15.

15) Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. (NLT)

Remember he said he learned to be content through the many tests that God allowed him to go through. He grew spiritually—matured. We have access to that same power and strength. You have to think about that, but God's Spirit empowered him with the knowledge that there was something passed those bad times. There was another side coming. What we might say today facing similar circumstances like Paul faced,

"I don't like the place I'm in right now. It's not fun, it's not pleasant, it hurts."

Especially if we have the right perspective, we can say,

"But I'm okay because I know in the end, I'll be alright."

Skipping ahead because I'm running out of time.

Point 3—again this is the way we look at things. Like Paul said, we gaze on something differently than we normally would.

3. Be content that God's in charge and has a plan.

Sounds pretty simple. I think most of us are distressed by the corruption and everything we see in the world today. It bothers us a lot, and it should. You remember back in Genesis 6—I won't turn back there—but mankind came to the point in their progression where God was going to stop it. He told Noah to build an ark. It would take him 120 years but build an ark, we're going to end this all right now. Even back then, they thought they were in charge, but they weren't. They were just very temporarily in charge. Man always thinks that way. He thinks he's in charge. He's the only one in power. God is going to change all of that.

Remember back in 1 Samuel where Israel wanted a human king and God told them what was going to happen. That very same thing is happening today. You want a human being, rather than God, ruling your life? You want human beings to give you

your values and morals, then that's what you're going to get and that is exactly what we're getting today. You look at all the people, all the characters. A couple of books on the characters in the Bible—Pharaoh, Nimrod, Sennacherib, Cyrus, Darius, Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar—now there was a guy who thought he was in charge. What a story that one is in Daniel. Even with Satan, God is in charge and He has a plan. That plan is depicted in many, many scriptures.

Let's go to 1 Corinthians 10:13 from the NIV. The context here is idolatry. This refers to our condition in the world even today.

1 Corinthians 10:13 *No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.* (NIV)

Those coping mechanisms we all have; prayer, we have God's Word, we need to fast at times to draw closer to God. In that we can find a measure of contentment. That's another coping mechanism that we can have and use.

Wrapping this up, we'll go to one last scripture in Philippians 4, just one verse. Paul says in the context that in everything he was well fed, whether he was hungry, no matter his circumstances it was sufficient. He was satisfied with it at that point in his life.

Philippians 4:13 *I can do all things [which He has called me to do] through Him who strengthens and empowers me [to fulfill His purpose—I am self-sufficient in Christ's sufficiency; I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him who infuses me with inner strength and confident peace.]* (AMP)

He said the same thing in Romans 7 remember, when he was describing his struggle with his own human nature. He knew that empowerment, that strength, came because God called him, gave him a mission to fulfill. He called us too, the same way. Maybe not something as dramatic as what Paul was led to do. Our calling is just assured nonetheless. He knew whatever he faced in his physical life was only temporary. We tend to forget that— even with what we know today. He knew God was really in charge and summarizing things we just discussed, no matter what. We know that the emperor Nero had him killed. The legend is that he was beheaded.

Paul—again to summarize it all up—knew that he had the freedom to choose with God's help, with His Holy Spirit. He fully embraced those concepts where he could arrive at a measure of contentment—where he had contentment. We can choose that today. We can be content—satisfied with the knowledge that God has given us with His calling. He promises we can find a measure of contentment and maybe we can get to the point where Paul said,

“Whatever happens to me, I'm okay”.