



Philippians: Week 7

Week 7, Day 1 - Philippians 4:10-13

¹⁰ I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me but had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹ Not that I am referring to being in need, for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. ¹² I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Understanding the Passage:

As you read the passage above, ask yourself if you could say the same thing as Paul. Are you able to describe yourself as truly content? Take a moment to really think about that. Does your contentment vary depending on the category – work, family, house, health, position or title, bank account?

Even though Paul said he is not in need (v. 11), we should not forget that he is writing from prison. In fact, his current location and circumstance makes this part of the letter all the more compelling.

The Greek word that is translated as content in this passage is *autarkes*, which was used by Stoic philosophers in Paul's time to mean "self sufficient." That is, not needing anyone or anything else. It was considered to be the most valuable attribute of a wise person. It was used as well to describe a country that has everything it needs and doesn't have to import anything. In some ways, Paul's meaning is close to this – his contentment doesn't hinge on his imprisonment or freedom. It didn't hinge on how much money he made or if he had nice things. However, it does hinge on a person – it comes from being satisfied in Christ.

Notice that in verse 11 Paul says he *has learned* the secret of contentment. He didn't always know this, and it's likely that he struggled with it as we all do. Like the philosopher in Ecclesiastes, he learned that nothing in our world satisfies us the way that Jesus does. Contentment is the fruit of our relationship with God.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Do you relate to Paul not finding out the secret to contentment until he needed to?
2. What allows Paul to be content in any circumstance?
3. Spend some time in prayer asking God to help you find contentment no matter your circumstances.

Week 7, Day 2 - Philippians 4:13

¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Understanding the Passage:

Everyone from beauty pageant contestants to professional athletes quotes this verse. Behind John 3:16, this may be one of the most quoted verses of scripture. The issue lies in the fact that it's often quoted incorrectly or out of context.

This verse immediately follows the passage we read yesterday about finding contentment in the midst of struggle. Paul had discovered that he could be content no matter the circumstances – whether he has little or whether he has plenty – because of the strength of God within him helping him to endure his circumstances.

Many folks use this passage in conjunction with a personal goal. “This is what I want to do; it’s me and Jesus, so it will happen.” I’ll win that pageant, I’ll run that marathon, I’ll get the promotion.” That’s a misuse because it’s about the power of positive thinking. But that makes it more about us than Jesus.

Notice also that Paul doesn’t say, “I can do *anything*...” It is not a promise that we’ll succeed in our own plans because God will give us supernatural power to do whatever we want. Instead, Paul means that we can endure any challenging or difficult circumstance that we encounter because we are strengthened by God.

This verse isn’t about going out and conquering the world, but knowing you can withstand it when it feels like the world is conquering you.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What does Paul mean by “all things”?
2. For what purpose does God strengthen us?
3. What kind of hope does this promise give you?

Week 7, Day 3 - Philippians 4:14-18

¹⁴ In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress. ¹⁵ You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone. ¹⁶ For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account. ¹⁸ I have been paid in full and have more than enough; I am fully satisfied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

Understanding the Passage:

In Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, he describes the help that was given by the churches in Macedonia (Philippi was in the region of Macedonia):

We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia, for during a severe ordeal of affliction their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means and even beyond their means. (2 Corinthians 8:1-3)

He’s clearly talking about the Philippians – noting that they gave not just out of their wealth and excess, but as a spiritual discipline even when it was beyond their means Paul sees the Philippians as partners in the gospel mission.

Because of our experience of grace, as Christians we should have a strong impulse to give to others, whether to individuals in need or to the church as a whole.

Paul describes the gift from the Philippians as a “fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing God.” This kind of ceremonial worship language is found throughout the Old Testament. Paul wants them to know that he sees their offering and generosity as an act of worship. It may have been sent to Paul, but it was for God. The gifts they sent were meant to move the needle forward on God’s mission.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What are your motivations to give of your own resources?
2. What holds you back from giving?
3. How do you feel about the “profit that accumulates to your account”?

Week 7, Day 4 - Philippians 4:19-20

¹⁹ And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Understanding the Passage:

Paul continues making the case that satisfaction and contentment comes from God, not from ourselves. Paul wants the Philippians to stay focused on God, no matter the circumstances around them.

Here’s the good news: God is wanting to meet all of our needs because God is so compassionate.

But like 4:13, verse 19 can be easily taken out of context and misinterpreted. God isn’t satisfying every “need” that we could possibly dream up. It’s likely most of those things aren’t needs at all. And we see many situations in the world in which our real needs (for health and healing, for enough financial resources to take care of ourselves and our families) aren’t met in the way that we wish they were.

What God promises is that as we participate in the ministry of the gospel, we’ll be blessed. God meets all of our needs *according to the riches in Christ Jesus*. The riches in Christ Jesus are grace, hope and love.

The doxology (verse 20) says that God should be glorified. According to the Westminster Catechism, “glorifying God and enjoying him forever” is to be our chief end. Scripture points us over and over to places and events in which God does something for God’s own glory – in doing so, God’s glory is revealed to the whole world so that more and more folks may come to know God and believe.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What needs will God meet?
2. What are God’s riches in glory in Jesus?
3. How does your life and attitude glorify God – that is, how does it reveal the goodness and nature of God to other people?

Week 7, Day 5 - Philippians 4:21-23

²¹ Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me greet you. ²² All the saints greet you, especially those of the emperor’s household.

²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Understanding the Passage:

Paul’s final benediction in this letter echoes his greeting at the beginning. He asks that the Lord bestow unmerited favor (grace) on all of the Philippian believers so that their attitudes (spirits) would enable them to increase in spiritual maturity. It is only by God’s grace that they are going to be able to do all of the things that Paul has asked them to do in this letter.

In the same way, we need God’s grace in order to grow in our own faith. This is why God extends prevenient grace (the grace that comes before our belief that draws us to God) and sanctifying

grace (the grace that God continues to pour into us to bring us closer). We should not fool ourselves into thinking we can pull ourselves up by the bootstraps of our own effort in order to become more Christlike. We simply cannot do it on our own.

It is notable that Paul sends greetings from saints (believers) in the emperor's household. This was a term that described those in Caesar's civil service and imperial government – some were slaves and others were among the regular citizens. Paul is conveying to the Philippians that some Romans near the center of power have converted to Christianity. This would have been an encouragement to them.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How might it be encouraging to the Philippians to receive greetings from those with Paul and from those in the emperor's household?
2. Imagine yourself writing a benediction to a group of folks you care about. What would your prayer for them be?
3. If you had to sum up Philippians in a single sentence, what would that be?

Video Questions

1. Tom and Katie discussed the main idea of Philippians that has stuck with them from this study. What is the main idea that has stuck with you? Or something you've never noticed about Philippians before?
2. Paul writes about finding contentment in all situations – what is the secret that he's learned?
3. When you've thought about achieving contentment, what are the worldly things you've said "if only I have..." about?
4. Do you think there is there a good purpose for discontent?
5. What does "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" mean to you?
6. Does Tom's comment about not living on your own compassion, strength and will resonate with you? How can you "send Jesus to answer the door"?
7. Paul relied on community to support him. What is the role of community in your life?

Prayer requests and other notes.