

AIM

- To explain that contentment and generosity are marks of a true disciple

EXPLORE

- *What questions do you have over the Follow-Up from Session 7?*
- Read Philippians 4:8-9
 - *What should we spend our time thinking about, according to verse 8? Whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable—all of which are summarized by, “If anything is excellent or praiseworthy.”*
 - *Write down the opposites of all the descriptive words Paul uses in verse 8. False, depraved, wrong, tainted, ugly, shameful*
 - *If you were to dwell on such things, what effect would it have on you? What we reflect on has an effect on how we behave and on how we feel.*
 - *On a typical day, what things tend to preoccupy our minds? Obvious examples include TV, newspapers, internet, friends, movies, etc. The impact of these things may not necessarily be negative. It is a question of learning to “discern what is best” (1:10).*
 - *What incentive is there to do what Paul says (v. 9)? If we aim to follow Paul’s example (as he followed the example of Jesus—1 Corinthians 11:1), the God of peace will be with us. When we live obedient lives, we experience God’s peace in our lives.*
 - *How will you act upon Paul’s command in verse 8?*

LISTEN (DVD)

“I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation” (Philippians 4:12).

Introduction

A newspaper article about a depressed TV star quoted her as saying that there were days when she just cried and couldn’t eat, days when she just fell into a black hole of despondency and felt like a detested member of the human race. The article then ended with these words, “She is a very pretty woman with a doting husband, three adored step-children, two golden retrievers, seven horses, and a large house with its own cinema and fifty acres, including a polo field. She’s had an extremely successful career in TV, and made a fortune. She should thank her lucky stars.”

Let’s simplify that argument in mathematical terms:

Physical beauty + doting husband + 3x adored step-children + 2x golden retrievers + 7x horses + house (large) + cinema + 50 acres + polo field + successful career + money = contentment

So, according to this newspaper, and most other people, the secret of contentment is “change your circumstances.” Since her circumstances were great, she should just stop her moaning and be content.

We’re somehow convinced that, after years of chasing “a little more” and still feeling discontented, getting a better _____ will somehow make us content. So, how much is enough?

“I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances,” says Paul in chapter 4 verse 11. He says it again in verse 12: “I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation”. Are we able to say the same thing? What do you need to be content?

The word “content” in Philippians 4 literally means “complete”. So Paul is saying that he doesn’t get his sense of completeness from the things he owns, the food he eats, the job he does, the place he lives or the friends he has. In fact, he has learned to be content, not just when he doesn’t have much, but even when he has “plenty”; for he knows, as do we (deep down and by experience), that “more stuff” doesn’t equal contentment. We can have as much as a TV celebrity and still be discontented; by the same token, we can have as little as a death row prisoner, and still be content/complete.

In this final passage of Philippians, Paul reveals the secret of contentment.

1. We can be confident in Christ’s power.

“I can do everything through him who gives me strength”, says Paul in verse 13. “Everything” doesn’t mean, literally, anything he wanted to do; in the context, it means that in every circumstance (tough or easy, good or bad), God gives him the strength to be content. And notice, Paul had to “learn” this...just like we do.

The whole of Paul’s letter sings with this confidence in God’s power: “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion” (1:6; cf. 2:13); “I am confident in the Lord” (2:24; cf. 3:9); “If on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you” (3:15); “[The Lord Jesus] will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (3:21; cf. 3:20); “The peace of God ... will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (4:7); and so on (cf. 1:29; 4:19).

Application: We need to have that confidence too, if we’re to be content in every situation. We can trust God with everything: our time, money, career, family, future, and life. The difference between contented Christians and discontented Christians is TRUST in God and His promises. But, we won’t trust God if we don’t know Him! Thus, we must read the Bible to learn of God and His truth, which will buttress our confidence (2 Corinthians 1:20)!

- *Put a personal illustration here, perhaps about a time when you placed too much confidence in yourself, and failed.*

2. We can be confident in God’s provision.

As we saw in chapter 3, Paul encourages us to be discontented with our knowledge and experience of God (3:12). Here, on the other hand, he implies that we should be thoroughly content with whatever God – in his loving wisdom – gives us.

Whether we are wealthy or lack material things; whether we are healthy or face debilitating illness; whether we are single or married; whether we live in a free country, or suffer in chains like Paul – we must remain confident of one thing: God will meet all our needs “according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (v 19).

Application: This is not a guarantee that God will make us healthy, wealthy and popular, but it is a guarantee that he will meet all our needs.

- *Illustrate this with a testimony from your own life, or from someone known to you.*

Paul demonstrates this confidence in his attitude to the gifts the Philippians have sent him.

He is delighted that the Philippians have sent him a gift (v 10), and he is extremely grateful for the repeated and self-sacrificial giving that has characterized their Christian lives (v 15-16). He describes what they’ve done as “a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God” (v 18).

But even so, Paul doesn’t depend upon their gifts to make him content. Far from it! As he says himself in verse 11: “I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances”. He is content because he knows that – whatever happens – God will meet all his needs.

Application: We need that confidence too, if we're to be content. We need to be confident in God's power, and confident in God's provision. That's the example Paul sets.

Conclusion

Here we are at the end of this letter and the end of *Discipleship Explored*. Paul has taught us many things:

- to remember that God always finishes the work he starts
- to contend for the gospel
- to look to the interests of others
- to show our salvation in the way we live
- to remember that only Christ can make us righteous
- to set our hearts on heaven
- to rejoice in the Lord
- to be content in all circumstances

And to do all these things for the glory of God (v 20).

And did you notice what Paul wrote in verse 22? He says: "All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household". Even though Paul has been taken captive in the Roman Empire at Caesar's pleasure, he reminds us that even Caesar's household has been taken captive by the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ! What a privilege to follow Him!

DISCUSS

- *Was there something in particular that stood out or struck you from the DVD?*
- *In what ways does society tempt us to be discontent?*
- *Paul says that he has "learned the secret of being content in any and every situation." Where does Paul find true contentment, according to Philippians 4:13 (cf. 4:7-9; 1:21; 3:10-11)?*
- *What practical steps can you take in order to be content in "any and every situation"?*
- *What do verses 14-18 tell us about the generosity shown by the Christians in Philippi?*
- *How should we "share in the troubles" of fellow Christians today?*
- *Does verse 19 mean that Christians will never be in financial difficulty? Why or why not?*
- *What is encouraging about the way Paul ends his letter (vv. 20-23)?*

FOLLOW-UP

See the document entitled "Session 8 Follow-Up." Please note that these follow-up questions differ from the ones in the *Discipleship Explored Handbook*.