SESSION 3
The Key to Contentment

Question 1:
What makes you feel especially content?
THE POINT
True contentment comes through Christ alone.

THE PASSAGE
Philippians 4:10-20

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE
Life has many stages. When you look back at the various life stages there seems to be a pattern—whatever stage you were in, you were eager to move to the next one.

- You couldn’t wait to get to high school, but once you were there, you couldn’t wait to graduate.
- You couldn’t wait to get to college, but it didn’t take long before you were eager to move to a career in the real world.
- You couldn’t wait to get married, but soon you began talking about starting a family.
- You landed the job you wanted, but before long you set our sights on another job, another position, or retirement.

Each stage offered some degree of contentment, but you still had a yearning. Your heart longed for more. Maybe it’s still the same for you. If you are not careful, your heart can live in discontentment.

The apostle Paul knew what it was to live a life of highs and lows, to have much and to be in need. As situations in his life changed, his contentment did not. In Philippians 4, Paul gave the “secret” to being content regardless of your current situation.
Philippians 4:10-14

10 I rejoiced in the Lord greatly because once again you renewed your care for me. You were, in fact, concerned about me but lacked the opportunity to show it.
11 I don’t say this out of need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself.
12 I know both how to make do with little, and I know how to make do with a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content—whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need.
13 I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me.
14 Still, you did well by partnering with me in my hardship.

It’s a great boost to our faith when God takes care of us in such a way that it can be only explained as a work of God. We aren’t the same when we see Him provide and no one else can get the credit. Paul knew well what it meant to move forward in faith and see God provide through a community of believers. In this passage, Paul was writing to express his appreciation for the financial support he had received from the Philippians.

Some time had passed since the last time the Philippians were able to help Paul. They cared for him and what he was doing, but they “lacked the opportunity to show it.” Perhaps they weren’t aware of a need, or Paul didn’t have a need. We don’t know. We do know that, when the opportunity arose, they certainly stepped up.

Although this gift came from the Philippians, Paul knew very well that they only delivered God’s provision. He knew the mighty hand of God was behind this provision. Paul “rejoiced in the Lord greatly.” His thanks was to the One who was behind the gift and who moved the church to care and provide.
Even as Paul thanked them for their concern for him, he let them know he would be fine with or without their financial support. The apostle Paul was no stranger to the trials of life that could have easily caused discontentment in his heart. He had been imprisoned, whipped five times with thirty-nine lashes, beaten with rods three times, and faced death and multiple dangers (2 Cor. 11:24-27). Paul often went without food and knew what it was like to sleep in the cold, yet he could say, “I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself.” Paul wasn’t exempt from pain and the trials of this life just because he was a faithful servant; in fact, it seems that his hardships were due to his faithfulness.

The secret to Paul’s contentment? “I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me.” He knew what it was to be “well fed or hungry, … in abundance or in need,” and in every situation, Paul found his strength and contentment in Christ.

Paul was writing specifically about how he had learned to be content in all circumstances. In order to achieve contentment, he needed to depend on Christ for his strength. The strength to rest in God and be fully satisfied came from Him.

It is unfortunate how many people take this passage out of context. Athletes like to quote verse 13 as if it were written to help them make a winning shot in basketball or a grand slam in baseball. People like to quote it before job interviews or daunting tasks. While we certainly should seek God and depend on Him in all circumstances, the point of this verse is that, however our circumstances turn out, we can be content because of Christ.

**Question 2:**

*Why is God’s strength a necessary ingredient for contentment?*
Philippians 4:15-18

15 And you Philippians 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 in Thessalonica you sent gifts for my need several times.
17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that is increasing to your account.
18 But I have received everything in full, and I have an abundance. I am fully supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you provided—a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

Paul expressed gratitude for the way the Philippian church supported him. In fact, it was the only church in Macedonia that did so. He was grateful they believed in God’s call on his life and contributed to the cause of spreading the gospel. This is a reminder that our churches should be leading the charge in supporting missionaries and church planters who have forsaken all for the great cause of spreading the gospel. Each church planter and missionary should be able to echo the words Paul wrote: “You sent gifts for my need several times.”

Paul had some hard days in Macedonia. He suffered physically in Philippi (Acts 16:16-24). He met opposition spreading the gospel in Thessalonica that ultimately led to his departure (17:1-10). No wonder he was so grateful for a church that stood by him during these times. Although it was from a distance, Paul felt the Philippians’ support. The generosity of the church in Philippi remains a model for the church today to emulate. Christians should be known as people of generosity, especially when it comes to the spreading of the gospel. We should be known as people who encourage and bless others.
Through Paul’s ministry, he had spread the gospel and helped to start many churches, but only Philippi reciprocated and supported him when he needed it. Paul mentioned this fact without a hint of complaint. He focused on giving thanks for what was done instead of complaining about what was not done.

We are blessed to be a blessing in return. God has not only given to us so that we may be provided for, but He wants us to have the opportunity to be a provision for others. The American dream is to accumulate, while the gospel of Christ compels us to receive and give. We should all live as missionaries on this earth with a desire to spread the message of Christ, understanding that all we have is for Him and the advancement of His gospel. In the end, we will stand before our Father, and we will be held accountable for how we lived our lives (1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Cor. 5:10). We must be careful that we don’t get caught up in accumulating and forget to support the cause of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20).

To save is wise. To be a good steward is biblical. But to accumulate to the point of neglecting the spread of the gospel is ungodly. Live so that you leave a legacy of being a blessing to many!

**Question 3:**

*Can you share a time when someone’s generosity overwhelmed you?*
Philippians 4:19-20

19 And my God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.
20 Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

“And my God will supply all your needs.” What a promise! The Philippians had helped Paul in his time of need. They supported him and sacrificed much. They gave out of a heart of generosity and a love for the gospel. They could do so freely because God would take care of them. Living with simplicity rests in the truth that God takes care of us.

That wonderful promise gets even more wonderful when we see that God supplies what we need “according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” Our God has unlimited resources and riches. Our God is the Creator of the universe, the One who owns it all. Our God is not poor, in debt, or low on resources; He lacks absolutely nothing. His resources are unlimited—so we can rest in the truth that, when God provides, He provides abundantly!

This is not the false promise often proclaimed in the “prosperity gospel.” We can’t just name whatever we want and claim it. That indeed is a false gospel. God is not a genie who is here to answer all our commands, flood our accounts with money, and fill our homes with every possession we desire. God could certainly do that with His unlimited resources, but our contentment comes through resting in Him, not in an abundance of stuff. He provides what we need.

**Question 4:**

*How have you experienced God supplying your needs?*
Living a life of simplicity rests in this truth. While we might acknowledge that truth, our human nature—our sinful human nature—always wants more. We often don’t just pray for our needs; we seek after our wants. Having all our material desires met won’t make us any happier or more content, even though our sin nature will try to convince us otherwise.

God will meet our needs—and He will often do it in unexpected ways. To the Ephesian church, Paul described God as “him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us” (Eph. 3:20). Trusting God means

**DIGGING DEEPER**

**BIBLICAL STEWARDSHIP**

Paul developed a comprehensive theology of stewardship. Its most thorough statement occurs in 2 Cor. 8–9, where he solicited support for a famine relief offering. He stated that the Macedonians led the way in giving, and most likely the primary church to give was Philippi (2 Cor. 8:1-5). Their giving was exemplary because they gave out of “rock-bottom poverty.” Their contribution was a “fragrant offering” to God because of its sacrifice, its Christian motivation, and its significance to the spread of the gospel.

A benefit to the believers was that they would experience God’s provision. Just as God had met Paul’s needs in the work of the gospel, so God would meet their needs. The context of this promise deserves careful attention. Paul spoke to those who actively supported the work of the Lord. His statement of 4:15 indicates what he meant: God meets the needs of those who give to him. In the context of ministering being ministered to occurs.

God’s supply is “according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” “According to” means that the supply is suited to the resource and like it in kind and extent. God, therefore, bountifully blesses those who give with glorious provision in accord with his glory and for his purposes. Since the glory is associated with Christ—it is “in Christ”—Paul probably spoke of one of the benefits brought to those who are in Christ. “Glorious riches” are available to those who give as the Philippians did.

trusting Him to provide, and we trust Him to provide in His timing and in the way that is best for us.

I have been praying for my atheist father to receive Christ as his Lord and Savior but it hasn’t happened—yet. I desperately want this to happen. I’ve asked and prayed. I will continue to trust God to answer my prayer.

God knows what we need. He knows when to give us what we need. He promises to supply our needs. Let’s trust Him to provide.

**Question 5:**
*What do you appreciate about Paul’s attitude expressed in these verses?*

**Engage**

Why do you think so many people are discontent?

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Are you more or less content than you were two years ago? Why?

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How would total contentment in your circumstances actually change those circumstances?

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LIVE IT OUT

A life of simplicity finds contentment in Christ alone. How can you live out that truth? Consider the following suggestions:

- **Choose contentment.** Evaluate your heart for signs of discontentment. Ask yourself: Am I trusting in money more than in Jesus? Do money and possessions bring me more joy than Jesus? Can I really say, “Christ is all I need?”

- **Choose to trust.** Make a daily decision not to allow circumstances determine how content you will be in this life. Memorize Philippians 4:12-13 to remind you simply to trust Christ for all things: “In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content — whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me.”

- **Choose to give.** Give of your time, talent, or treasures. Sometimes the cure for discontentment is to give to others. Find those with needs and give to them. Let God use you as His answer to their prayers.