

STUDY GUIDE

LETTERS FROM PRISON: PHILIPPIANS (Week 11)

A MESSAGE SERIES AT NEW CITY CHURCH

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BRIAN KRUCKENBERG

Philippians 4:10-23

10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. 11 Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. 12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. 13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

Background: Contentment or Conquering?

Paul has made some pretty bold claims in this letter to the Philippians. In Verse 4, he tells them to always rejoice; in verse 6, he tells them not to worry or be anxious about anything; in verse 7, he introduces them to the peace of God and in verse 9 he shows them the God of peace. Now, he tells the Philippians, and us today, to be content in all circumstances. We live in an utterly discontent culture: what we have, look like, married to, with our lot in life. Paul rejoiced regardless; he was free from worry, knew a surpassing explicable peace and learned to be content. How?

This passage teaches us how to be content in all circumstances; contrary to popular belief this passage isn't about conquering something but rather is about the honorable and difficult idea of contentment.

Contentment: three keys.

To find contentment, Paul teaches us to:

understand the providence of God;
live independent of circumstances; and
to rely on Christ's power.

Confidence in God's providence.

10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity.

Contentment begins with a settled confidence in God's control of the events of life that ultimately reach us for our good. He is content with God who providentially orders opportunities. This is the baseline in contentment: great confidence that God has not forgotten me, that God is attentive to me, that God knows the number of hairs on my head and even puts my tears in a bottle (Psalm 56:8).

Questions for Reflection

1. What are the biggest sources of discontent in your life?
2. Do you trust that God knows what you need and when you need it?

Living Independent from Circumstances.

11 Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. 12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.

Paul plainly says that his circumstances have nothing to do with his contentment. Nothing.

Question for Reflection

3. True or False. I can look past my circumstances and find contentment in God.

Sustained by Christ's Power.

When Paul writes, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" it is important to know exactly what he was saying. He uses two Greek verbs in this sentence: *estrus* - "to be strong, or to have strength" and *endunamoo*, "to infuse with strength." So, what Paul is really saying is this:

"I am strong enough to go through anything because of Him who infuses His strength into me."

In other words, "I have the ability to deal with any kind of material circumstance because of my spiritual strength." Often people read this verse and think it is about "conquering" something but it is really more about finding contentment. Paul was saying: I can go without food for a while; I can go without clothes; I can go without warmth; I can go without freedom, etc. I can endure all of that because I am so strengthened on the inside. Paul was no stranger to suffering and he drives home this same point when he writes to the church at Corinth:

And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Cor. 12:9-12

Questions for Reflection

4. Do you think it can be harder to find "contentment" than to have a "conquering" attitude?
5. Why would we rather "conquer" than be content?

Radical Generosity.

Paul teaches us how to "apply" this contentment by showing the church in Philippi as an example:

14 Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction. 15 You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; 16 for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. 17 Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account.

In Community.

Jesus put us in community to rely on each other for our physical needs. Paul didn't *need* the church in Philippi but God chooses to use the church to meet needs. But, this takes sacrifice and going beyond what you think you can do. Paul tells the Corinthian church about the generosity and faith of the church in Philippi:

We want you to know about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, 2 for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. 3 For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord. 2 Cor. 8:1-3

In essence, the church in Philippi gave 110%! They were poor, but they gave liberally to Paul out of their deep poverty.

Questions for Reflection

6. Why don't most typically give like the Philippians did? Are we selfish? materialistic? Do we think it is too risky? like we'll miss out?

Two Promises.

A Future Return.

17 Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account.

Paul is telling the Philippians that how they live and give in this life will impact the life to come! We see this principle repeated over and over again in the Scriptures. Jesus reminds us to “*store up for yourselves treasures in heavens.*” Matthew 6:20, Mark 10:21, Luke 18:22. Paul writes: “*If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward.*” 1 Cor 3:14. And, again, Paul tells Timothy: “*They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.*” 1 Timothy 6:18-19.

Meeting Current Needs.

19 And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

God promises that he cares for the needs of those who come after Him and seek to do His will.

Questions for Reflection

7. Do you believe that the actions in this life have any bearing on how we will experience heaven?
8. How are you “investing” in eternity?
9. Do you think think that if you