



# THE DISCIPLINE OF CONTENTMENT

WEEK 11  
08.13.17

## FOCUS VERSE

### Philippians 4:11

Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

## LESSON TEXT

### Philippians 4:6–14

6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

9 Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.

11 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

12 I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

13 I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

14 Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction.

### Hebrews 13:5

5 Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.



## FOCUS THOUGHT

Contentment does not focus on our circumstances but on God's ability to supply our every need.



# CULTURE CONNECTION

## The Good Oil Days

In early 2016 the price of a barrel of oil dropped drastically as Iran flooded the already-low market with bargain barrels. Shale-oil investors and workers were already broke. Consumers at the gas pumps began to grin with joy. More oil-industry workers lined up for unemployment. Oil investors wrung their hands in despair at what the future held for the industry. Those who fish the market to buy low and sell high stumbled into the pandemonium in hopes of profiting once the market stabilized. Welcome to a world run by money and the love of it.

The child of God must anchor to something deeper than economics. When individuals determine to find contentment in the stability of the Spirit and to live by the oil of gladness, their emotions need not rise and fall with

market fluctuations. Unfortunately, too many have equated things or money to the blessings of God. Although it can be devastating to lose things such as one's home or income, believers must live with a made-up mind to always be content with whatever situation life hands them.

In the Great Depression and in other recessions since then, many business owners or investors who faced bankruptcy committed suicide. A person needs more to live for than profit or wealth. An Apostolic believer has a sure hope and a home prepared away from the unpredictable markets. The more one seeks first the kingdom of God, the easier it is to be grateful for anything and everything that He adds unto His people.

### OUTLINE

#### I. PAUL'S PRESCRIPTION FOR CONTENTMENT

- A. Do Not Be Anxious
- B. Pray for Needs
- C. Pray with Thanksgiving
- D. Think
- E. Do

#### II. LESSONS LEARNED FROM PAUL'S LIFE

- A. Being Abased
- B. Abounding
- C. Receiving the Lord's Strength for Both Extremes

### CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Not very often does one think of an eighteen-year-old as contented. Elijah Goodwin was a rare young man who discovered the joy of contentment at such an age. While most young men are full of unrest and ambition for the life ahead of them, Goodwin learned to savor each moment as it unfolded. He was a circuit-riding preacher in 1825 on the American

frontier. Walking by faith as he traveled and ministered, he missed many meals and had virtually nothing to call his own. Preaching thirty-five sermons a month at eighteen locations in three states, Goodwin noted that his expenses well outran the contributions he received.

One night, he lost his way in the woods. Unable to find his way or to sense the nearness of any human habitation, he settled in for a night in the forest. He wrote, "I made a bed of my saddle blanket, a pillow of my saddle, and a covering of my overcoat. I tied my horse, by the bridle, to my arm, so that if a bear or a panther should approach, my horse would become frightened, and, by pulling at the rein, would arouse me. It was a pretty cold night. The first snow of the season fell during the night. I was near the Patoka [River] and could hear the rippling water as it rushed against the bank and over the drift-wood near me. As I lay there, I thought it was a great pity that all that sweet music was being wasted on the air, without an ear to hear it, or a human heart to enjoy it" ("Contentment for a Poor Itinerant Preacher," *Leadership* magazine, James Berkley, Fall 1988).

The apostle Paul said it this way: “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (Philippians 4:11). Clearly, Goodwin did not learn contentment because he had comfortable circumstances. Paul did not learn contentment in bowling-green lawns and ivory palaces. Contentment is something that comes from God, not circumstances. Some people in even the most posh settings complain of being very unhappy. Discontent is sin. Contentment is godly character.

Western society feeds discontent. Children are not happy unless they have the latest toys being advertised. The man of the house feels uneasy about driving a gasoline-powered vehicle when all the “real men” are driving diesel trucks. Society makes women feel self-conscious and dissatisfied with their looks, hair color, weight, or anything else naturally occurring about themselves. Even young men have become consumed with fashion consciousness.

If anything, American culture is built on consumerism—the continual pursuit of something new. This has nothing to do with what is better. In the rush for newness or coolness, people often throw out things that are still functional and serve their purpose well. More than a question of “does it serve its purpose?” the question becomes “is this color in?” Men trade in SUVs because those models are so outdated. Women discard barely-worn garments because they want to be seen in the latest fashions.

Like a bald eagle building a nest in a tree on Madison Avenue in New York City, a contented child of God stands out from the crowd. Satisfaction is such a rare thing that people often pause and take note. Contentment is not simply a discipline, however, but the evidence of other deeper disciplines in one’s life.

## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

The child sulked in the corner, feeling dejected and disappointed. The Christmas gifts were nice but not what he wanted. Looking at the heap of presents for weeks, he had imagined getting a quadcopter with HD video capture streaming a live feed to the remote. It was the thing he had always wanted—ever since he got the last thing he had always

wanted. Instead, his presents included some brightly colored socks, a model truck to build, a flashlight with survival kit inside, and a new jacket. *Dumb, dumb, dumb*, he thought to himself. He was not content with the nice new things he did receive because they fell so far short of what he felt he deserved.

Everyone wants to be contented. We want to be satisfied and happy in life—that is natural. G. K. Chesterton said, “There are two ways to get enough. One is to continue to accumulate more; the other is to desire less.” Jesus had an easy solution. He taught us to stop thinking about it. He commanded us not to be anxious or worried with problems such as “What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?” (Matthew 6:31).

Even in Jesus’ day, consumerism was killing contentment. “For after all these things do the Gentiles seek,” He said. But to God’s people, He gave this promise: “Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things” (Matthew 6:32). To be contented, we must first realize that our Provider knows our needs. We can rest assured that someone who loves us is looking out for us; we do not have to live in desperation. Instead of seeking the latest trend or worrying about daily necessities, we should seek “first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33).

Give up worrying. That is a key feature of being a child of God. You no longer have to fear lack, and you no longer have to live in the winless pursuit of the next big thing. Jesus taught His listeners not to worry about tomorrow. He said, “The morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matthew 6:34). While that is great advice, many people who know the command still struggle with how to do that.

The key to contentment is the discipline of humility. Humble people are content in whatever situation they find themselves. This is not to suggest that humble people are lazy or that they never seek to better themselves. Rather than being clothed with the latest fashion, the child of God should “be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5). After giving the command to “humble yourselves therefore

under the mighty hand of God,” the writer explained that this is done by “casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Peter 5:6–7). Humility does not hold to a self-image, because its concern is with others; therefore humility can be content in every situation. Humility gives while pride takes. Humility seeks the good of others while pride seeks self. Contentment cannot coexist with pride.

## **I. PAUL’S PRESCRIPTION FOR CONTENTMENT**

The most contented people are often those who have given up the most. They have learned to be happy having little to nothing. This is not because they would not enjoy plush and fluff but because they have realized luxury and pleasure are not essential to a happy life. A spirit of happiness makes life luxurious. Paul was one of those who left everything for the cause of Christ. From him we learn the principles of contentment.

### **A. Do Not Be Anxious**

Paul said, “Don’t worry about anything” (Philippians 4:6, NLT). One key to contentment in life is not to worry. To worry is to attempt to play God without His power. We try to see the future and contemplate all that could go wrong, all the while being powerless to change any of it. Instead of playing God, we should bring to Him “every thing by prayer and supplication” (Philippians 4:6).

*One key to contentment in life is not to worry.*

The universe is infinitely huge with millions of galaxies and trillions of stars. Somewhere in that incredible creation there exists what appears to be a random galaxy called the Milky Way. On one of the outer arms of that spiral of stars hangs a little solar system we call home. In what appears to be an arbitrary placement, sits Earth, sandwiched between the orbits of other planets of inconsistent sizes and textures. On our planet, mostly covered by water,

rise land masses where numerous living creatures dwell, including humankind. God has chosen to focus His attention and energy on humans He made from the very planet they occupy.

If our Earth or Moon were moved out of orbit only slightly, life would cease. Not only does the Lord pay attention to humans, but even a sparrow does not fall to the ground without His knowing it. Yet humans tend to look down at the things of the Earth from which they came rather than up at the Creator who holds everything in order.

### **B. Pray for Needs**

Living on planet Earth was not our idea. God put us here and He knows the plans He has for our lives. He knows and He cares. He is concerned with what we are concerned about. So we go to Him in prayer.

Instead of praying, “Oh, God, I have no idea where this money is coming from!” we should pray, “Lord Jesus, I thank You that You’re going to see that this bill gets paid.” Then we need not think about it again except to remember to be thankful when the money comes in, whether through extra work or a gift in the mail.

Or, more practically, we might pray, “God! I need patience! Now!” Rather, we should pray, “OK, Lord, I’m at my wits’ end here. Thank You for giving me patience. You are the God who supplies all my needs and this is a need. I thank You for fulfilling it.” Then spend time in thanksgiving, remembering past answered prayers. Even reiterate them to your children, creating a memorial. Sing a worship song.

Panic-stricken prayers can leave a person feeling more hopeless after praying than before. Notice the command “Do not be anxious” is given first, and then, “Pray.” We are not to pray with anxiety but with faith. Faith does not say, “I don’t know what I am going to do, God. I am trying my best, but this is just a mess. I don’t think I have ever been so low before. This is awful.” Faith says, “Lord, I am feeling overwhelmed right now, but I know that You understand my need before I even mention it. My problems are Your problems because I am Your child. Thank You for carrying me through this situation.”

### C. Pray with Thanksgiving

This situation happened in the life of a young mother who was seeking the Lord:

Knock, knock, knock came the sound on her bedroom door.

The praying mother looked toward the door. "Yes?"

"Can I have an apple?" came the voice of her five-year-old.

"Hang on just a minute. I'm almost done." She turned back to praying again.

Knock, knock, knock came again, almost instantly.

"Yes?"

"Can I have an apple?"

Mom hesitated this time wondering if perhaps the child hadn't heard. "Um . . . yes, give me just a minute."

Knock, knock, knock.

In frustration she answered, "What!"

"Can I have an apple?" came the voice one more time as innocently as he asked at the first.

"Just a minute, please. I'll be right there."

She dropped her head to pray again for the last five minutes of her quota, and the Lord spoke. "You're begging Me for things I've already promised. Instead of asking Me to do the things I told you I would do, learn to thank Me in advance before they ever happen." Her prayer life was never the same. And the little boy was graciously given his apple.

When we learn to do everything by "prayer and supplication with thanksgiving," we will experience the promise of Philippians 4:7: "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." When we take a moment to apply this Bible promise, we will feel the protecting peace of God surround our hearts. It is as simple as taking our present concerns to God and thanking Him for already hearing and providing a solution. After the first request, we can thank the Lord daily for solving the problem and handling the situation. What is already done in the spiritual realm will soon appear in the natural.

A young mother learned this lesson in a difficult situation. Silent sobs wracked her body in the ER waiting room as the words seemed to come screaming over the speakers: "Code Blue Room 22! Code Blue Room 22!"

The mother prayed as Hannah prayed that day in the Temple with such deep desperation that no sound came from her mouth. "Lord Jesus, This is Your child. It's been an honor and a blessing to have her these past three months. I couldn't have asked for a more precious baby. However, if You want her . . . she's Yours." Within minutes, the baby was airlifted to the children's hospital.

When the mom and dad arrived at the second location, something had changed. That distress, anxiety, and extreme fear seemed to have miraculously disappeared. The mother thought her child was dying or already dead and had little faith in doctors. Yet she was at perfect peace.

It didn't make sense. How was that possible? It was a mother's worst fear and nightmare of losing a child, yet she was calm as if this happened every day. Was she callous? No. Years before when her son had asked for an apple three times that day, this mother had learned to thank God for the answer, not to beg or demand. She never expected to be in such circumstances this day had brought, yet here she was living out yet another verse God wanted her to personally experience.

When a believer prays with thanksgiving, giving God the praise He is due in spite of the circumstances, He will give such peace that it will pass all understanding. Will one's situation change? Maybe; maybe not. Circumstances do not matter. It is our worship, our praise, that matters. We can face any situation in life when we have the peace of God. And think of the awesome stories we can pass on to our children and grandchildren of the mighty acts God has done for us and will do for them!

Everyone faces situations in life where these principles are so vital. We must learn these if we intend to enjoy life. Interestingly enough, it does not stop there. We have prayed, thanked Him, and received peace; what more could there be?

### D. Think

Depression overwhelmed her like a black cloak soaked in poison. It threatened to suck the life from her body. Fear came upon her so quickly she barely had a chance to get a grip on reality. It would be so easy to give in, cry, or scream. Her husband and the kids had

gone out on a short trip. She wanted to beg God to save the lives of her children, whom she feared were in danger. Yet, she knew that would be pointless; nothing was wrong with them. Her body was panicking and her mind was telling her danger lurked very near. She could see her daughter calling in tears to say there had been a severe accident and she “alone was left to tell the story.”

She did not cry, beg, or scream. Lessons over the years had been well-received for this very moment in her life. She never expected she would experience depression. Yet rather than give in to the chemical changes in her body, she took control of her thoughts. Quietly bowing her head, she prayed, “Lord Jesus, I know that You have everything under control. I realize that things are crazy mixed up in my body right now and I’m experiencing unnecessary fears. Thank You, Jesus, that You’re here and there’s nothing wrong; everything is OK. My husband and children are fine.”

Then she quoted Philippians 4:8, a verse her mother had taught her many years ago: “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” The Word of God is powerful. After quoting this verse for the third time, the depression lifted. The fear disappeared.

Then the phone rang. It was her husband’s number.

Fear attempted to return, but no! She refused to trade peace for fear!

“Yes?”

“Hey, Mommy!” her son greeted her and then asked a simple question before going back to his day. There was nothing wrong. There had been nothing to fear the whole time. Her only medication was the living and powerful Word of God.

We live in a world today that is surrounded by fear: the news, sickness in family members, home issues, threat of losing a job, politics, and so on. One must make the effort to think on pure, wholesome, uplifting things. Rather than talk about what is going wrong at work, we talk about what is right with God. Rather than complain about problems and worries,

we talk about truth and love. Various forms of media can broadcast a constant torrent of sadness. Even weather stations seem to focus on the melancholy effects of bad weather rather than on the beauty and sunshine available somewhere in the world. Fallen humans are prone toward what is negative. Those risen with Christ should be known for uplifting and constructive conversations.

When feeling the heaviness of life and those overwhelming feelings that the world is about to come crashing down, a child of God should start quoting Philippians 4:8. This is not to suggest that clinical depression is not real. However, in the same way we pray for the healing of a broken bone, we can pray for healing of our brain function. Thankfully, He is our healer.

## E. Do

Of course we not only pray with thanksgiving and fill our minds with thoughts from above, but we live a life in harmony with the teachings of the Lord. Paul told the people, “Do it!” (See Philippians 4:9.) When we do the truth we know, peace will follow. Showing kindness, preaching the gospel, and loving others are commands in Scripture from which we gain peace when we obey them.

## II. LESSONS LEARNED FROM PAUL’S LIFE

In II Corinthians 11:24–28 Paul told about some things he had been through. Yet he still lived for God, never wavering, standing strong. The man who said, “Learn from me!” knew what he was talking about. (See I Corinthians 11:1.) He knew how to survive life-threatening storms, hunger and thirst, being stoned to death, and being beaten on more than one occasion. The secrets to his sanity are in Philippians 4:6–8.

There will always be problems. So long as there are people, there are problems! But no one on his deathbed lies there wishing he had worried more and panicked more. No, people wish the opposite. They look back in hindsight and realize all those situations seem to have worked out one way or another. We can enjoy life because not only do things have a way of working themselves out, but we have a loving Lord who works all things for our good.

## A. Being Abased

We are so quick to want to quote Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me,” without knowing or understanding what it takes to gain that strength. Paul was not superhuman. In our perfect world we do not like to admit it is all right to go without: fasting out of necessity sometimes, not having extra money to blow on oneself, having to make the old shoes last a while longer when one’s heart was set on a new style. We put too many things in life up there next to oxygen. Paul went without things many times and lived to tell about it.

Joy is not based on events. Samuel Johnson once said, “Happiness [contentment] is not a state to arrive at but, rather, a manner of traveling.” The Lord offers joy and peace on the journey.

*The key to a joyful life is learning to find contentment in both the valleys of life and the mountaintops.*

## B. Abounding

In whatever state we are in, we can be content. Part of happiness comes with realizing how good we have it. Rather than complaining about not having shoes, one should be thankful he at least has feet. Sometimes we have to go through struggles in life to get a sense of how good we actually have it.

The story is told about one farmer who complained to his pastor about how he just could not take his home life anymore. His wife and kids were crowding up the house and now they had to let the mother-in-law come live with them.

The pastor asked, “Do you have a rooster?” When the farmer told him he did, the pastor said, “Bring it inside and let it live with you in the house.”

The simple man took the man of God’s word and did as he was told. The next week, he said, “Reverend, that rooster has made a mess of things. Having that noise box in the house has not helped anything!”

The preacher simply asked, “Do you have any goats?”

“Why, yes. Yes, I do.”

“Bring them inside.”

The farmer did as instructed and came back to his pastor after a week. “Pastor, this idea is not working. The goats are horrid to live with. This has been the worst week of my life! Are you sure you are getting your wisdom from God?”

“Do you own a cow?”

“Of course.”

“Bring it inside and let it live with you too.”

Fuming, the farmer stormed out to try one more outlandish attempt to please the parson. The next week the farmer was as hot as a teakettle and ready to explode. “This is the stupidest thing I have ever done. If the health department knew I had a chicken, goats, and a cow in my house, I’d be—I’d be—”

“Send them out of the house,” the pastor said.

“That’s it? Just get them out?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll do it immediately.”

A week later the pastor came to visit the farm.

“Howdy, preacher,” the farmer said in a happy voice.

“How is home life?” the pastor asked.

“Wonderful; just wonderful. I never realized how much room we had in that house until we kicked all the livestock out. It’s been so peaceful and quiet and such a pleasure to enjoy just my family again.”

## C. Receiving the Lord’s Strength for Both Extremes

Most people will experience both sides of life: the ups and the downs. The key to a joyful life is learning to find contentment in both the valleys of life and the mountaintops. Paul learned this in whatever state he was in (Philippians 4:11). Each believer must discover how to live like this too.

## INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Proud people are often discontented. To be truly contented in life, one must become preoccupied with something bigger than self. To overcome the continual lust for more stuff or better situations in life, one can give. Give what little you do have and learn to appreciate what is left over.

In an interview, Mother Teresa claimed there was an amazing freedom in giving everything you had to others. Such voluntary poverty is a foreign concept in most minds, but those who have given up all, such as Paul, discover a joyful contentment not available from the shopping mall or *amazon.com*.

The mythical King Midas thought he would be content with only a little more gold. However, he soon found that the gift of turning everything he touched into gold robbed him of what was most valuable—the friendships and family in his life. A spirit of greed does not make one happy. A continual lust for a better life does not make a better life.

A man was sitting on a pier, fishing from the ocean. Another man in a yacht pulled up and asked, “Are you catching anything?”

The man on the dock pulled up his stringer and showed several large fish.

“Wow, you are good at what you do.”

“Thank you.”

“You should start selling your fish and buy a boat.”

“Why?”

“So you could catch more fish.”

“And then what would I do?”

“You could buy more boats. You could have a whole fleet of fishing boats.”

“Why?”

“Then you would have all kinds of money like me,” the man in the yacht said. “Then you could live life the way you wanted. You could kick back and enjoy yourself.”

“I’m doing that now,” the man on the pier said as he tossed out his line once more.

The next pay raise, moving to another home, finding a better church—all these myths bait us along, causing us to think we will find happiness. Contentment is what we find in the Lord as we seek a better life for others. Continual attention to our own satisfaction will not make us joyful but more aware of what we lack. Caring for the needs of others will help us appreciate what we do have and be more considerate as well.

The life of contentment starts within as we learn not to worry about anything but take everything to the Lord in prayer, thanking Him for handling it best. Daily, we feast our minds on life-giving thoughts rather than on the dreadful and the negative. Humble living and Bible-based thinking create the perfect mix for a contented heart.

## REFLECTIONS

- What are some tough things you have lived through that have caused you to be thankful for other aspects of your life?
- How does generosity and thinking of others help a person be more contented in life?
- What prayer can you thank God for answering today? How does this strengthen your faith and give you peace about the situation?
- How have you learned to be abased and to abound in the Lord?