

**Philippians 4**  
**Part 2**  
**Joy and contentment**

**Philippians 4:10-13** The Message

**Content Whatever the Circumstances**

*'<sup>10-14</sup>I'm glad in God, far happier than you would ever guess—happy that you're again showing such strong concern for me. Not that you ever quit praying and thinking about me. You just had no chance to show it. Actually, I don't have a sense of needing anything personally. I've learned by now to be quite content whatever my circumstances. I'm just as happy with little as with much, with much as with little. I've found the recipe for being happy whether full or hungry, hands full or hands empty. Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it through anything in the One who makes me who I am. I don't mean that your help didn't mean a lot to me—it did. It was a beautiful thing that you came alongside me in my troubles.'*

Paul has learned to be content in whatever circumstances he finds himself.

What a wonderful lesson. He didn't have to be pampered to be content, he didn't have to be looking forward to his next bonus or his next holiday on a Greek island – he had **learned** to be content. Full or empty, rich or poor - content.

This tells us right at the outset that contentment is something we have to cultivate – it does not come to us naturally. Paul had **learned** this.

Paul found his contentment in Jesus. Jesus he had learned was **all** sufficient; He met every possible need that Paul might come up against. Contentment is not an escape from every day life – Paul's situation is evidence of that – it is a place of peace and confidence in the very midst of the battle and hardship. Contentment is an attitude of heart and mind. God is absolutely taking care of everything, no matter what the circumstances may look like.

**Philippians 4:11 -13** The Amplified Bible says it like this -

*<sup>11</sup>Not that I am implying that I was in any personal want, for I have learned how to be content (satisfied to the point where I am not disturbed or disquieted) in whatever state I am.*

*<sup>12</sup>I know how to be abased and live humbly in straitened circumstances, and I know also how to enjoy plenty and live in abundance. I have learned in any and all circumstances the secret of facing every situation, whether well-fed or going hungry, having a sufficiency and enough to spare or going without and being in want.*

*<sup>13</sup>I have strength for all things in Christ Who empowers me [I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him Who infuses inner strength into me; I am self-sufficient in Christ's sufficiency].'*

In verse 11 there are two important words, **'learned'** and **'content'**. The verb 'learned' means to learn by experience; Paul's spiritual contentment was not something he had the moment he was saved. He went through *many* difficulties in order to **learn** how to be content.

Today we would say *'you are in the process Paul!'* but he had no one who had gone before to tutor him, he learned by the experience of the Holy Spirit within him that Jesus was sufficient for any and every situation, good, bad or indifferent. He didn't go round, but through!

And the word content actually means **'contained'**. It is a description of a person who finds an inner resource, so they do not have to depend on something outside of themselves. Paul's inner resource was his utter trust and faith in the Lord Jesus with whom he had a face to face encounter on the road to Damascus. He was sufficient in Jesus, no-one and nothing else. There were no ups and downs in Paul's life, he just went right on serving Jesus with everything he had. The close of this letter to the Philippians shows us he was not a victim of his circumstances but a victor over them.

In this chapter Paul gives us three wonderful spiritual resources that make us adequate and give us contentment –

**The Providence of God** – today we hear less and less of the Providence of God. We sometimes get the idea that the world is a vast natural machine and that even God Himself cannot interrupt the wheels as they are turning! But the Word of God teaches the providential working of God in all things and especially in the lives of His people. He did not wind the world up like a 'clockwork orange' and leave it to run down!

The word **'providence'** itself comes from two Latin words – PRO meaning before, and VIDEO meaning to see. God's providence means that God sees beforehand. In His omniscience, He knows everything that will ever happen – anywhere in the universe - ever. But that is not all it means, literally it means *the working of God in advance to arrange situations for the fulfilling of His purposes*. Everything is being worked out according to His eternal plan which means that sometimes He orchestrates difficult situations which ultimately will work for our profit. That alone gives us such confidence as we come into situations and circumstances which have the potential to destabilise us. God is absolutely taking care of everything.

Scripturally the account of Joseph and his brothers gives us the meaning of God's Providence.

### **Genesis chapters 37-50**

Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave when he was 17 years old and he was taken down to Egypt where he stayed for many years. One night Pharaoh had a dream about seven fat cows and seven lean cows and seven full grains of corn and seven thin grains of corn. God showed Joseph that there were to be seven years of plenty and seven years of famine coming, and as a result of his interpretation of the dream, Joseph was made a leader second only to Pharaoh himself. You can read this in -

## Genesis 41: 1 – 8 New International Version

### **Pharaoh's Dreams**

<sup>1</sup> When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream: He was standing by the Nile, <sup>2</sup> when out of the river there came up seven cows, sleek and fat, and they grazed among the reeds. <sup>3</sup> After them, seven other cows, ugly and gaunt, came up out of the Nile and stood beside those on the riverbank. <sup>4</sup> And the cows that were ugly and gaunt ate up the seven sleek, fat cows. Then Pharaoh woke up.

<sup>5</sup> He fell asleep again and had a second dream: Seven heads of grain, healthy and good, were growing on a single stalk. <sup>6</sup> After them, seven other heads of grain sprouted—thin and scorched by the east wind. <sup>7</sup> The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven healthy, full heads. Then Pharaoh woke up; it had been a dream. <sup>8</sup> In the morning his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him.'

You know the story, after 20 years Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to buy corn and were eventually reconciled to him, together with his father. The point I want to make here is a little sentence that Joseph uses in Genesis 45:8 –

*'<sup>8</sup>So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God:'*

God meant it for good. God allowed these circumstances to bring about His plan for the deliverance of not only Joseph but his whole family - the Providence of God; His hand overruling in the affairs of men.

Paul himself knew this same truth –

### **Romans 8:28**

Life is not a series of accidents; it is a series of appointments.

### **The unfailing power of God:**

### **Philippians 4:11 – 13**

Paul is quick to tell his friends he is not complaining. Paul's happiness did not depend on situations or things. His joy came from something deeper, something apart from either poverty or prosperity. Most of us have learnt how to be abased because when difficulties come we run to the Lord, but few have learnt how to abound. Prosperity has done more damage to believers than poverty.

In some versions verse 11 uses the word 'instructed' rather than learned. This word means initiated into a secret and was used by the pagan religions and indeed Freemasonry to refer to their inner secrets. What Paul is saying is that through trial and testing he was initiated into the wonderful secret of contentment in spite of impoverishment or plenty.

### **Philippians 4:13 Amplified Bible**

*<sup>43</sup>I have strength for all things in Christ Who empowers me [I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him Who infuses inner strength into me; I am self-sufficient in Christ's sufficiency].'*

It was the power of Jesus within Paul that gave him spiritual contentment. Unless we draw on the deep resources of God, by faith, we will fail because of the pressures of life. This verse in Philippians was Paul's 'motto' and it can be ours as well as we realise and appropriate the truth of our position in Christ. Jesus taught His disciples exactly the same truths in His discourse on the vine and the branches –

### **John 15:5 – 7**

The overruling providence of God and His unfailing power are two resources on which we can draw, but there is a third.

### **The unchanging promise of God:**

### **Philippians 4:10-20 New King James Version**

#### **Philippian Generosity**

*<sup>40</sup> But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. <sup>11</sup> Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: <sup>12</sup> I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. <sup>13</sup> I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. <sup>14</sup> Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress. <sup>15</sup> Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. <sup>16</sup> For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. <sup>17</sup> Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. <sup>18</sup> Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. <sup>19</sup> And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. <sup>20</sup> Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

Paul thanks the church at Philippi for their generous gift and compares their giving to three very familiar things –

1. A budding tree – verse 10, the word '*flourished*' carries with it the idea of a flower or a tree budding and blossoming. Sometimes in our Christian walk we go through seasons of winter spiritually, but spring comes again and there is new life and blessings. The tree is not picked up and moved, the circumstances have not changed, the difference is the new life that has been formed within us during the winter season. Processing our disappointments and setbacks with God is so important for our growth in order that we flourish and do not wither

and die. Remembering that He is always with us and in us, He wants us to succeed and flourish is a source of comfort in dark winter days.

2. An investment – verses 14 – 17. Paul looks upon their missionary gift as an investment that would pay rich spiritual dividends. The word ‘shared’ in verse 14 is referring to their fellowship with him – this church entered into an arrangement of giving and receiving. The church gave materially to Paul and received spiritually from the Lord through Paul. The Lord will never fail to pay one spiritual dividend; the church that is poor is the one that fails to share materially.
3. Sacrifice – verse 18. Paul looked on their gift as a spiritual sacrifice laid on the altar for the glory of God.

**1 Peter 2:5**

**Romans 12:1,2**

**Hebrews 13:15**

**Romans 15:16**

Here Paul sees the Philippian believers as priests, giving their offering as a sacrifice to the Lord.

**Malachi 1:6 -14**

The message in this scripture is that we should give the Lord our best, not something we do not need, but the finest we have.

There is an interesting contrast between Philippians 4:18, 19 and if we paraphrase what Paul is saying, we could say *‘You meet my need and God will meet your need’*. One of the greatest attributes of God is that He *gives*. He *gave* His only Son that we might live. As His children, giving should be instinctive for us, most certainly when we find ourselves in need, the first thing we should do is to look around to see what we can give away. This is totally foreign to our fallen human nature, but it is the outworking of Christ in us, the hope of glory. Nothing we own or have will remain, all things in this life perish, why then hold on to them? We are stewards, not owners of all we possess.

Just pause at this point and ask the Lord if you are holding on to people, things, money, possessions that He requires you to give away or to release to Him.

Paul says, *‘you gave to me out of your own poverty’* almost, you gave what you did not have is the implication, and because of this, God will supply all your needs out of His rich treasury.

Paul is saying, when God’s work is done in God’s way for God’s glory, it will not lack God’s supply.

Contentment comes from recognition of the complete work of Jesus on the cross. Our resources are the providence, power and promises of God and these resources made Paul sufficient for every demand of life upon him, and they are sufficient for us. God is our all sufficiency.

As we come to the final phase of our study on this most practical of letters, we are beginning to see that this is not about learning, but about living – everything we have studied needs to be put into practice in our everyday living experience or it is useless.

Let's just recap on the key points that will keep us joyful -

1. Surrender your mind to the Lord at the beginning of each day.

**Romans 12:1, 2**

It is really good to make these scriptures into a prayer as you surrender your body, mind and will by faith to God at the start of each day, together with -

**Proverbs 3: 5,6**

**Proverbs 16:3**

By praying these scriptures every morning, you are ensuring that God will take your day and prioritise it for you. You will no longer need to be worrying about what to do first, God will have the agenda, and you can relax and flow with His Spirit.

2. Let the Holy Spirit renew your mind through the scripture. Daily reading of the Bible is essential if we are to have our minds renewed.
3. As you pray, ask God to give you each day a single, spiritual and secure mind.
4. At intervals during the day, just bring your mind to rest on the Person of Jesus. If you are getting stressed and in danger of losing your peace and joy, stop and take an inventory, do I have a single mind, has anything happened that has caused me to lose the submissive mind, have I sinned (1 John 1:9) and go forward from there.
5. Set a watch on your mind. Don't let those thoughts run wild.

**Philippians 4:8**

When an unkind and impure thought enters, deal with it instantly. Take every thought captive to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5). Set your affections – your mind – on things above Colossians 3:2, and meditate on the scriptures whenever you can.

Finally, joy is *not* a selfish thing, it is God's gift, first to you - and then through you – to others, John 15:11.

So I conclude this study by saying to you –

***'Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say, rejoice.'* Philippians 4:4**

Recommended for further study:

'The Mind of Christ' by T W Hunt and Claude King available from [www.lifeway.com](http://www.lifeway.com)

