

I Know a Secret

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[0 : 00] you can turn to the very end of the book of Philippians because we are going to finish the book of Philippians, Lord willing, today. And what I mean is, Lord willing, like from here on in, we got to finish this because either I'm going to finish preaching it or someone else is going to have to do it. We're finishing it today, Lord willing, okay? Okay, so chapter four, Philippians chapter four, and we need to pick up starting at verse number 10. Philippians chapter four, we're going to start at verse number 10. If you're taking some notes, kids, and then we're going to go all the way down through the end and Josh will be reading our scripture today.

And Josh is going to read from the New International Version. So that's what you will see on the screen. If your version is a little different, that's just fine. And I'm going to use the CSB when I'm preaching today. So we will just have lots of grace and love and we'll learn together. All right? Okay, here's Philippians chapter four, starting at verse number 10. I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.

I'm not saying this because I am in need, for I've learned to be content, whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I've learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only. For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need.

Not that I'm looking for a gift, but I'm looking for what may be credited to your account. I have received full payment and even more. I am amply supplied now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

[2 : 27] And our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings. All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Let's pray. Father, we are so grateful to have your word.

Thank you for inspiring Paul to write this letter. Thank you for the strength that you gave to Epaphroditus to get the letter from Rome back to Philippi.

Thank you for preserving this letter for us down through the centuries so that we can read it and study it and memorize it and learn together.

Father, thank you for your kindness to give us the Holy Spirit. Please, blessed Holy Spirit, would you work in our hearts and work among us as we spend time now in your word.

We want to hear those things. We want to know those things. We want to believe and obey those things that you have for us here. So, would you please guard my heart, guard my mind and my mouth from saying anything that would be foolish or unhelpful or inaccurate.

[3 : 53] And please teach us those things that you have for us to see in this text. And would you also please draw our attention to our Savior Jesus.

It is in his name that we pray. Amen. As Paul concludes his letter to the Philippians, I wonder if you can hear a little sense of hesitancy in his words.

We pick up on this, for example, in verse 11. He qualifies his statements. He says this, I don't say this out of need.

And then again in verse 17, he says, Not that I seek the gift. There's a bit of hesitance in his writing. I wonder if Paul feels a bit of tension.

On the one hand, because of his imprisonment in Rome, he is very needy. But on the other hand, Paul has such a strong, selfless sense of apostolic responsibility for the Philippians.

[5 : 04] On the one hand, he needs to thank them for the generous gift that they sent to him through Epaphroditus. But at the same time, Paul doesn't want them to feel like they need to keep sending gifts.

Because the Philippians are also very much in need. And so Paul chooses his words carefully. Like how we choose a path in the muddy parking lot and tiptoe our way right now, this time of year.

Do you know the phrase, it's the thought that counts? You know that phrase? We say it's the thought that counts when we remember someone's birthday, but too late to get them a gift in time. We say it's the thought that counts. The Philippians are not a it's the thought that counts kind of people. They weren't like, oh, I heard Paul is in Rome.

That's really too bad. We should maybe send him something. But you know, it's a long way from here to Rome. But I guess it's the thought that counts.

[6 : 16] That's not the kind of people that the Philippians were. Look at verse 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.

It was not that they were unconcerned about Paul being in Rome. But that he's in Rome and they're in Philippi and what are we going to do about this?

But they don't just say, well, it's the thought that counts. They put together the gift and they send their guy, Epaphroditus, all the way to Rome. Look at verse 14.

Still, you did well by partnering with me in my hardship. 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.

[7 : 27] For even in Thessalonica, you sent gifts for my needs several times. This is a generous church. A church that loves to give. A church that is excited about gospel ministry.

So Paul thanks them for their partnership in his ministry. And I want you to notice how his thoughts go beyond the bread and the blankets and the books that their gift can buy.

Look at how Paul encourages them. First, by connecting their earthly gifts. Sorry, connecting their earthly gifts to eternal rewards. And then secondly, by reminding them that giving is an act of worship.

Look at verse 17. Not that I seek the gift. Here's that qualifier I mentioned at the beginning. Not that I seek the gift.

But I seek the profit that is increasing to your account. See how he draws a line from their earthly giving to their eternal reward.

[8 : 35] 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 is so thankful for the Philippians and their recurring gifts.

And Paul chooses his words carefully. Tiptoeing a bit around some mud puddles. See the

Philippians need to know this. That Paul was content in prison before their gift arrived.

And the Philippians need to know that Paul will be content spending their gift to buy bread and blankets and books while he's in prison.

He'll be content. He'll be content. And he wants them to know that he will be content after he's spent their entire gift and it's all gone. Paul is still going to be content.

[9 : 43] Look at verse 11. I don't say this out of need. For I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself.

Paul set a bold standard for gospel ministry. Didn't he?

And I suspect that as a result of this Paul experienced more suffering. More adversity. More hardship. Than any other Christian has ever known.

We can test it a little bit at least on our small sample here. On our sample cases. Did anyone here become blind the day that you got saved?

No? Well Paul did. Can you imagine? You get saved. You trust in Jesus and you're blind. Anyone here been whipped 39 times even once?

[10:56] Nope. Anyone here been beaten up with sticks? Nope. How about had rocks thrown at you? Big rocks, Kellen?

Okay, just little rocks. Listen to these verses from 2 Corinthians chapter 11. This is Paul telling the Corinthians how he has suffered.

Five times I received the 40 lashes minus one from the Jews. Three times I was beaten with rods. With big sticks like pool cues that you would use to play pool with. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked.

I have spent a night and a day in the open sea. Adrift. Out on the water. For a day and a night. On frequent journeys I faced dangers from rivers.

[11:59] Dangers from robbers. Dangers from my own people. Dangers from Gentiles. Dangers in the city. Dangers in the wilderness. Dangers at sea. All the dangers.

Dangers in the city. Dangers among false brothers. Toil and hardship. Many sleepless nights. Hunger and thirst. Often without food.

Cold and without clothing. Perhaps no other Christian has ever suffered more than Paul.

And yet I wonder if any other Christian has ever enjoyed a clearer understanding of contentment. Paul is in a barbaric Roman prison. There is no concern for prisoner comfort. There is no plan for meals or medical care.

[12:56] There is no urgency of a fair or speedy trial. If while Paul is suffering like this. He can say I have learned to be content.

Then maybe just maybe. Paul has something to teach us. When our circumstances are unpleasant. Inconvenient.

Disappointing. Or cause us tremendous grief. National treasure is a favorite movie in the Martinson household.

Do you know this one? I won't give away too much of the plot. But a secret map is encoded on the back of the Declaration of Independence.

Maybe you are familiar with Treasure Island. Where there is a map where the pirates have buried a secret treasure. And what marks the spot?

[14:02] An X. That's right. X marks the spot. When we read verse number 12 here in chapter 4. It's like there's a big X marks the spot over it.

This is the secret that Paul wants to teach the Philippians. This is the secret that the Holy Spirit wants to teach us. Look at verse number 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 need. Kids, do you like secrets?

What makes a secret special? Elam? Oh, yeah, good. You don't know anything about it. That's good. Yep.

[15:12] What else makes a secret special? Okay. This is harder. I didn't think.

I thought this would be a freebie. Okay. So if I have a secret and I go over and I whisper a secret in Lois' ear.

What is true about that secret? Who knows it? Only us. The two of us know the secret. And the rest of you do not know the secret.

This is what I want you to see first about the secret of contentment. It's this. Paul calls it a secret because not everybody knows it.

Think about that for a minute. Contentment is not received as part of the new birth. Contentment must be learned.

[16:15] When I started at my new job, when I walked in and they took me to my cube, I had a computer and two monitors and a mouse and a phone and a headset and a chair.

That's it. That is how much they thought I needed to get started. Now, since then, I have also received some things that I didn't really need to get started, but now I have them.

A nameplate for my cube so people know who sits there. I got a pen and some notebooks. And I also got some business cards.

And maybe this afternoon, if we have time, they're going to let me pick out some apparel so I can fit in around the office. I didn't get all of these things right away when I started.

I just got the bare minimum that I needed to begin doing my job. But since then, I have received more things. And this afternoon, maybe I'll get a few more things.

[17 : 21] Some apparel, perhaps. You know what apparel is, kids? Clothing. Swag. Okay? Now, similarly, on the day that you were saved, I wonder, are you saved?

It's important to ask that question. Am I saved? Have I trusted in Jesus? Is Jesus my Savior? Have I been born again? Ask yourself that question.

If you're a child, ask your mom and dad that question. On the day that you were saved, you received justification. And you received forgiveness, full and free and complete for sins, past, present, and future.

You received adoption into the family of God. You received citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. You received the Holy Spirit in full measure.

You received an address, an address in heaven, in the new kingdom someday. These are glorious, wonderful gifts.

[18 : 28] But you did not receive contentment. Not the day that you were saved. This is the first clue about the secret of being content.

Not every Christian knows it. But here's the second clue about the secret of being content. It is possible to learn it.

It's possible to learn it. How do we learn contentment? We learn contentment by living through what Paul calls any and all circumstances.

Any and all circumstances. You will never learn contentment if your life always goes smoothly and according to your plan.

You won't learn contentment that way. Contentment is learned through celebrating birthdays and weddings and anniversaries, starting new jobs, moving into new houses, enjoying new experiences.

[19 : 35] We learn contentment in those ways. But we also learn contentment through unexpected career change and the loss of relationships and shattered dreams and broken promises and unmet expectations and final goodbyes.

We won't learn contentment if life always goes according to our plan. It is possible to learn it. But it is learned in any and all circumstances.

Sisters and brothers, our Lord may orchestrate awfully difficult circumstances for us. You may suffer loss in ways that you never dreamed that you would.

You may endure hardship that is more devastating than you could ever fear. You may repeatedly experience what feels like the worst in every single situation.

What is God doing? God is teaching you contentment. Why am I so restless?

[20 : 54] Why do I fret? Why do I grumble? Why do I complain? Why is God's peace that passes understanding so shockingly rare in my life?

It is because I need Jesus to teach me the secret of contentment. I need to learn this by humbly submitting to God's wise plan.

Even when I don't like His plan very much. Anybody else? I'll just level with you. I am only today just barely able to preach this sermon.

A week ago when Tim was standing here preaching, had I had to preach this sermon, I would have been preaching it in hypocrisy. Total hypocrisy. It is only because the Spirit of God and Jesus so kindly continues to teach me about contentment.

And when I looked at this text last Sunday afternoon, and I realized that in six days I was going to be standing in front of you, I knew I had some learning that needed to happen in my heart between last Sunday and this Sunday.

[22 : 22] And I have a lot more room to grow. A lot more room to grow. I feel only just barely qualified to teach us about contentment.

Please don't think about contentment as fatalistic indifference. Contentment is not isolating yourself from difficulty.

Contentment is not bubble wrapping your heart in some kind of emotional detachment so that you don't ever feel pain. Contentment.

Grieve or celebrate. It is not some kind of an emotional flatline whether life is good or bad and we're just completely unemotional people. That is not contentment.

All of these qualifiers help us understand that learning contentment requires humility and wisdom and grace and a community of other followers of Jesus to help us discern these things.

[23 : 53] The first clue about the secret of contentment. Thank you, Josie. Not everyone knows it. And the second clue about the secret of contentment.

It is possible to learn it. Here is the final clue. The secret of contentment is satisfaction in Jesus. Satisfaction in Jesus.

The Greek word here that Paul uses for content is interesting. It's interesting because the word that he uses that gets translated to us as content means self-sufficient.

Now, we should think about this for a minute. What is going on here? Is Paul suggesting that contentment is just somehow taking care of yourself?

Being self-managed? Having all that you need in yourself? Is that what Paul is teaching? Well, not exactly.

[25 : 03] But stick with me here for a minute. God is self-sufficient. Isn't he? God is free from any dependence on anyone or anything in all creation.

God does not need. He never has needed. He never will need. In fact, you might say neediness is creaturely. And since God is uncreated, he cannot need.

God is then self-sufficient. The only perfectly content being in all of the universe.

You see where I'm going here? Paul seems to be saying that contentment means being like God.

Free from anyone or anything in all of creation affecting your peace or your joy.

Free from depending on people making your life better. Free from depending on things to make your life happier. For Paul, being content means needing nothing except for God and being satisfied in every circumstance with God.

[26 : 31] Now, I suspect that there are some young boys perhaps who are thinking he doesn't need anything.

He needs nothing. This is how boys reason, right? What about air? What about food? What about water? How can Paul say that he doesn't need any of those things?

What will happen if Paul doesn't have food or air or water? Elam, give it to me. He'll do what? He will die.

And what has Paul already told us? To die is gain. Paul really doesn't need anything else.

He doesn't even need air or food or water. If Paul dies, he says to die is gain. I will go and I will be with Jesus. Paul has learned the secret of being content.

[27 : 39] See, contentment maintains this eager hope that Christ, chapter 1, verse 20, that Christ will be honored in my body whether by life or by death.

Contentment means resting in this unfailing promise from chapter 1 and verse 6 that he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion.

Contentment means never losing perspective that we read about in chapter 2 and verse 13, that it is God who is working in you both to will and to work for his good purpose.

Contentment means remembering this from chapter 3 and verse 20. Our citizenship is in heaven and we eagerly wait for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you will grab hold of God's promise that you have everything you need in Jesus for every single moment of your life, if you will grab hold of this promise that you have in Jesus, everything you need for every single moment of your life, imagine how free you would be.

[29 : 10] No clinginess to people or possessions. No manipulation of situations or circumstances.

No demanding control. No incessant reputation rebuilding. Just satisfaction in Jesus Christ.

How would your life change if you were free from the overwhelming fear and dread of losing a loved one, a child, a spouse, a parent, a friend?

How would your life change if you were free from that overwhelming dread? How would your life be different if you no longer needed to be noticed or praised or thanked or affirmed when serving people?

How would your attitude improve if your life wasn't potholed by complaining about every unpleasant circumstance?

[30 : 20] You say, that, that would take an incredible amount of strength for me to live that way. Guess what?

I have good news for you. Look at verse 13. I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me.

This is not about winning basketball games. This is not about cleaning the bathroom after little boys have used it. This is not about climbing mountains or running marathons.

This is not about contentment. This is not about contentment. This is not about contentment. I know.

Do you see this in your Bible? Do you see this verse? Can you draw a line from this verse up into Paul's thoughts about contentment?

[31 : 30] It is all right there. It is all right there. And then we take this verse and we slap it on coffee mugs and we use this just as some kind of a platitude.

It is not a platitude. It is not a platitude. This is power to be content. Where does the power come from? To find that Jesus is our treasure.

It comes from Jesus. All of the strength that you need to be content in every and all circumstances, any and all circumstances, all of the strength that you need is yours in Jesus Christ.

And Paul does not oversimplify or ignore the realities of life. Paul just understands that when God is all you want, then God is all that you need.

He tells us this one more time down in verse 19. And my God will supply all your needs according to his riches in Christ Jesus.

[32 : 48] Three clues about the secret of contentment. The first, not everyone knows it. The second, it is possible to learn it.

And the third, it is learned through being satisfied in and with the Lord Jesus Christ, finding him to be your greatest treasure in any and all circumstances.

Let's pray about this together. Father, we are grateful to have your word. And we confess collectively as a group that as we read this text, we each have considered various ways that we have lacked contentment in the last week.

Blessed Holy Spirit, would you please come and do work in our hearts as individuals as we take a few moments to examine our hearts, to be honest with you about our need for more of your work, to be honest about the ways that we need to continue learning contentment.

Help us as we take a few moments quietly before you. Please, Holy Spirit, convict, challenge, comfort, encourage. You know each of our needs.

[34 : 25] Please do this work in our hearts right now. Lord Jesus, thank you for teaching me a little slice of contentment this week.

And thank you for doing that in such good timing so that I did not have to stand up in front of your people and preach a sermon to them that I was failing miserably to obey myself.

Please forgive me for the ways that I have lacked contentment even this week. And please continue to teach me this secret in any and all circumstances.

Father, thank you for the forgiveness that is ours in our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you that we have forgiveness, free and full and complete forgiveness for all of our sins, past, present, and future, that we can celebrate what Paul says in Romans chapter 8.

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And so for those of us who are in Christ, we celebrate, we revel, we praise you for the forgiveness that we have received.

[35 : 58] Help us to live in light of this forgiveness, to live in light of your grace to us in Christ, and help us to continue to learn this secret of contentment.

We believe, good Father, that this is for our good and for your glory and for our joy in our Savior, Jesus Christ.

And so we give you thanks for all of these things. It's in his name that we pray. Amen.