

Contentment

Philippians 4:10-13

Usually I tell you a story or anecdote before we read the scripture and start talking about our subject. After lots of deliberation I decided to do two this time. First I'll share with you that a few weeks ago, I received a link by email to a page where you type your birthday and it tells you on what day of the week you were born, how the moon was, when you were conceived and a lot of other funny information, including your age in years, in months, in weeks, in days, in hours, etc. after doing a few birthdays I remembered I tried the day Ana and I kissed for the first time and discovered that it was a few weeks short of 1000 weeks or 7000 days! So as we speak, exactly 1000 Saturdays ago Ana and I kissed for the first time, which means we've been kissing for 7000 days and a few hours.

Of course, Ana had no clue of this unusual celebration of ours which allowed me to surprise her. As most of you know, my finances are not very bright after some 18 months of crisis in the real estate world where I belong. This has translated in a slow market (continental-drift-slow market). I make a living on commissions over sales and sales are not happening often enough... anyway, what I'm trying to say is that a fancy diner or a nice present were not an option, completely out of the question. So I recorded 3 CDs: one with the same songs I recorded on a tape for our first date 19 years ago, which she still had. A second one with significant songs of our Mexico City years and a third one with newer songs, belonging to our years in Baja. Maybe for others, this would take a little while but for me (not being a computer expert, much less a iTunes guru) it took many hours, plus the playlists plus the covers, etc. But you know what? This project kept me going during some of the worse weeks in my life, financially speaking. And it was a testimony to the many young gals and guys who've been giving me a ride to work in the mornings and/or home in the afternoons since January with whom I shared my plans. And to my kids who had the chance to listen to them with me before delivering it, to make sure everything was perfect. And of course it was a pleasant surprise to Ana, who, needless to say has been supporting me in these difficult times as she has in the best of times. So, where does happiness really comes from?

Now, let me share the second anecdote before we start:

Once upon a time, in a seminar for married couples a woman was asked: is your husband making you happy? Does he really make you happy? The husband dared to raise his neck a little, signaling his confidence, knowing that she would say yes, since she had never complained during their marriage (and maybe he was very self-confident after recording a few CDs for her)... However, the wife responded with an emphatic "NO, he is not making me happy". And before her husband's amazement, she continued: "he doesn't make me happy, I AM HAPPY! Me being happy or not, doesn't depend of him, it's up to me. I'm the only person my happiness depends on. I decide to be happy in each situation and each moment of my life... because if my happiness depends on some person, or something or a circumstance..., I would be in serious problems.

Everything in life changes continuously, people, wealth, my body, weather, pleasures, etc. an endless list... There are people that say: I can't be happy...cause I'm sick, cause I have no money, cause it is too hot, cause somebody stopped loving me, but what you don't know is that you can be happy in spite of being sick, too hot, without money, unloved...being happy is an attitude before life..."

So this wife is happy in spite of having a husband! (He's probably new) but there are many things that make us unhappy? why? there must be a way!! Let's look for it together.

PRAY FOR UNDERSTANDING

**As a rule, man's a fool
when it's hot, he wants it cool.
And when it's cool, he wants it hot,
always wanting what is not.**

That sounds familiar...it's definitely me and many of you I'm sure... Do you remember the song, "I Can't Get No Satisfaction"? Decades later you still hear that as a common complaint. All the time you meet people who are unhappy, unfulfilled, and unsatisfied. Sometimes even in the mirror.

Also, if you were to believe what the commercials tell you, you would believe that contentment was something that could be sprayed on, rolled, inhaled, eaten or driven. As if all of these products would give you lasting contentment. They don't.

What is the secret of a satisfying life? If you could bottle contentment you could make millions.

Philippians 4 (10-13) 11-12 "...I have 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 have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation..."

What is contentment? It is not apathy, laziness or complacency.

Contentment is independent from circumstances. You do not base your happiness on the situation around you. So dear brothers and sisters, WITH SOME PRACTICE YOU COULD BE HAPPY EVEN WHILE I'M PREACHING...Happiness comes from **within**. How do you get that kind of contentment and satisfaction in life?

Paul says contentment is **learned**. It's not something that's instant. Life is a school of contentment and the problem is most people never learn and they die unfulfilled and unsatisfied and unhappy. How do you learn contentment?

HOW TO EXPERIENCE REAL CONTENTMENT

Paul gives us four lessons to learn that will give us a satisfying, abundant life.

1. LEARN TO AVOID COMPARISONS

Comparing yourself to others always leads to discontent.

v. 11b "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances"

And that comes from not comparing yourself. If you want to learn to be content you have to avoid comparisons. There will always be people that make more money than you, who have greater opportunities, who have fewer problems. So what?

That has no bearing at all on your own personal happiness.

2 Cor. 4:18 "We don't look around at what we see right now, the troubles all around us. But we look forward to the joys in heaven. The troubles will soon be over but the joys that come will last forever."

Paul says, I don't look around, I look up. I don't spend my time comparing myself to other people. I keep my eyes on what is to happen.

Three misconceptions about happiness:

1) I must have what others have to be happy. That's the myth behind all fads and fashions. It's just not true.

2) I must be liked by everyone in order to be happy. You don't. Many people spend so much time trying to win the approval of others. You cannot go through life without some disapproval -- if you do anything, somebody is not going to like it. Even Jesus couldn't please everybody. Only a fool would try to do what Jesus couldn't do. You don't need everybody's approval to be happy. NO PARENT ON EARTH WOULD BE HAPPY!!

3) Having more will make me happier. Actor Alan Alda has been quoted as saying,

"It isn't necessary to be rich and famous to be happy. It's only necessary to be rich."

Contrary to Alan Alda - The secret to contentment is NOT getting everything you want! Fact is the amount of money you have doesn't seem to have a lot to do with the level of contentment people experience...Howard Hughes was asked, "How much money does it take to make a man happy?" He said, "Just a little more." As your income goes up, so does your expenses AND YOUR PERCEPTION OF WHAT YOU NEED TO BE HAPPY.

"ENOUGH IS NEVER ENOUGH" RODOLFO

I Timothy 6:6-8 "Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that."

All possessions are temporary. They're just loaned to us. We use them while we're here on earth, have a good time with them, enjoy them, use them for God's glory, but they're not going to last. Don't get an obsession with possessions.

2. LEARN TO ADJUST TO CHANGE

Life is full of ups and downs -- emotionally, physically, mentally, financially, etc. There's nothing certain in life except change. Change is certain.

How well do you handle change? How well do you handle when things are shaken up a little? OR A LOT?

Do you get frightened? Moody? Angry? Uptight? Paul says that one of the secrets of learning to be content in life is the ability to adjust to all kinds of circumstances and change. Paul says you need to learn to adjust to it. Your happiness in life will be largely dependant upon your ability to adapt, adjust, and be flexible. Change is going to happen whether you like it or not.

v. 12 "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want."

Paul says he's seen good times and bad times. What did experience teach Paul? In our words: **"I have learned to be independent of circumstances."** That is the secret of a satisfying life. You don't get your joys or happiness out of things, people, possessions, pleasures, profits, popularity, prestige... Paul says he's learned to be independent of circumstances.

When he's writing this, Paul is old, lonely and he's in a cold Roman prison. He's away from his friends. Yet he continually said, I can handle this, no problem, I can cope. I avoid comparisons and I adjust

to change. I am flexible. We must be flexible because circumstances usually aren't.

Paul says no matter what I go through I am not a victim. I choose not to be a victim. No matter what people do to me they are not going to control my life. No matter what hurt, experience or difficulty I go through and I have every reason to have bad memories, I will not let it victimize me.

I am independent of circumstances. That is real freedom -- when you can say I am not controlled by my circumstances, I am not manipulated by the external things in my life.

People say "I'm OK, under the circumstances." Circumstances were never meant to be something you get under. Get on top of them. You don't have to live "under the circumstances" -- that's a choice.

There are three kinds of circumstances in life:

1) Those I can control and I do. Switch TV channels, Eat if you're hungry.

2) Those I can control and I don't. This is not excuse for laziness. Contentment is not laziness or complacency. If you can change a situation you don't need contentment - you need to get up and do something about it!

As Andy Warhol would put it:

“They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself”

3) Those I cannot control...and there are many in life! This is where you need contentment, in uncontrollable circumstances. Things that are beyond your power. You have done the best you could but they are still out of your hands. That's where you need to learn to relax, trust God, adjust and avoid comparing yourself. Sometimes we have to adjust, not just to circumstances, but to people - when they don't change.

Romans 12:18 "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

The key to adjusting is a **sense of humor**. The people who are the most emotionally balanced and stable in life are those who have developed a keen sense of humor -- the ability to laugh at themselves, their own problems and the difficulties. Rather than being devastated by problems they somehow find something funny in it all -- even in tragedy they can see humor here and there. MILTON SANDERS IS AN EXTRAORDINARY EXAMPLE, HA

Humor is crucial to learning to adjust. If you don't adjust you'll break down or burn out.

Circumstances demand flexibility in life.

3. LEARN TO DRAW ON CHRIST'S POWER

Instead of just depending on my own effort to make it through circumstances and my own energy, I must learn to draw on Christ's power.

v. 13 "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength."

You can handle when the kids are tearing the place apart, make it through the stock market crash, when you have problems and you don't know where to go. I can handle everything, Paul says. I can cope. He had an external power source. He was depending, not on his own power, but God's power.

LISTEN CAREFULLY MY FRIENDS:

Do you know how to know when you're depending on your own power? **You get tired!**

Fatigue comes from living life on your own resources rather than on the resources of God.

John 15:5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

It doesn't get much clearer, does it? On the one hand we're told that apart from Christ we can do nothing of lasting value in our lives. On the other we're told that we can do everything through Christ who gives us strength. One of those "everythings" is finding contentment in all situations.

What do you need to control? Do you need to get control of your time? your mouth? your temper? your weight? a bad habit? Paul says I can master **anything** with the help of Christ who gives me strength. Have you got a big problem that you're facing? Paul says I am ready for anything, I am confident. Satisfaction in life not only comes from contentment, it also comes from confidence. The confidence comes, not from your own power, but from Christ's power.

"He infuses inner strength". When I plug into the power then I really come alive. Paul had a problem. He prayed about it three times and asked God to remove this particular weakness in his life, "a thorn in the flesh". God did not remove his weakness. He responded,

2 Cor. 12:9 "But God said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in (your) weakness.'"

In Philipians "Sufficient" is the same word as "contentment". Sufficiency is contentment.

Contentment is independent of circumstances.

God allows you to go through problems in your life so you can learn contentment and sufficiency and He can show His power.

4. LEARN TO TRUST GOD TO MEET MY NEEDS

This is the secret of satisfaction in life.

v. 19 "And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus."

Not some or most of them or the religious ones – all!

It's like an insurance policy, you read through it to find out what is covered. Then, once you know, don't worry -- it's covered!

The Bible is God's insurance policy. There are over 6000 promises in the Bible which you can claim. As you read the policy manual find out what God has guaranteed to do in your life and thus don't have to worry about.

Matthew 6:31-33 "So do not start worrying: Where will my food come from? or my drink? or my clothes? ... Your heavenly Father knows you need all these things. Instead be concerned about everything else with God's Kingdom ... and he will provide you will all these other things."

Put God first and God will take care of your needs. Put Him at the center and everything else will be taken care of.

The real reason that people are unhappy, unsatisfied, and unfulfilled is because Jesus Christ is not the center of their lives. They are looking for fulfillment in all the wrong places. They run from this to that... looking for something that is going to satisfy them. We go from relationship to relationship, from job to job, from hobby to sports to recreation ...therapy, books, seminar - looking for the key.

But God has laid it out very clearly. You were made with a God shaped vacuum in your life and nothing will fill that void except God. When you try to find satisfaction in life through people, popularity, prestige... they don't last.

Discontent just means that Jesus Christ is not the center of my life. When I'm not contented it means I'm looking for something else. God wants you to have a happy, fulfilling, satisfying life. He said it.

"I have come that you might have life and that you might have it abundantly."

Life in the fullest is what God wants us to have.

But the way you have that satisfaction in life is by learning the lessons of contentment.

Contentment does not mean that you like the situation that you're in right now. You do not hear Paul saying he enjoys being in prison. He

is not overjoyed with his situation. He is independent from his circumstance. Contentment is not pretending you like what you really don't like.

Contentment is saying I don't care what I'm going through, with Christ's power in me, I can cope. I can handle it. I am sufficient for the problem. I don't like what I'm going through but I have learned to be content. I am independent of circumstance and it does not destroy my happiness. If you have to have a perfect situation and a perfect relationship to be happy you're never going to be happy. You have to learn to be happy **in spite** of your problems. That is contentment.

How? You draw on Christ's power. Paul says I can master anything with Christ's power in me.

You stop depending on your own power to make it. You get Christ's hope to cope. Plug in.

When you give up on your own power God can fill you, infuse you with new power.

When you are spending time on a regular basis praying to Jesus, studying God's word, and surrendering your life to the power of the Holy Spirit, you're going to find that no matter what else is going on in your life – you will feel more content. Why?

Because when you're living your life connected to Jesus Christ, you'll begin to understand that nothing happens to your life without His knowledge. Nothing that happens, either good or bad, can take you away from God's love.

Paul had experienced Beatings, stoning, jailing, shipwrecks, hunger, desertion, misunderstanding – you name it. But he says, with the confidence that only hard experience can provide,

“I can do everything through Him who strengthens me.”

In other words, “As long as I'm connected to the power and the strength that Jesus Christ gives – I will be content with whatever circumstances come upon me.”

Friends, I know some of you've got needs in your Relationships,

Emotions, Finances, physical and spiritual health, etc...I SUREDO!

Let's hear Paul's words again. Written from house arrest. Chained to a soldier. Unable to leave his home. Awaiting a trial that could end with his execution:

MY GOD WILL MEET ALL YOUR NEEDS

As usual I have to end with a quote, so if you believe all this is impossible or difficult, this quote from Henry Ford comes handy...

“If you think you can do a thing or think you can't do a thing, you're right”

Let's pray

Lord we thank you for this day. We need to learn the secret of contentment in our lives. You have each of us right where we are today for a purpose. We confess we give too much importance to people, things and circumstances to the point where our contentment greatly depends on them, cleanse our heart and mind. Teach us the secret of contentment in each and every situation of our lives and help us depend on you for all our needs. We put our lives in your hands and ask for understanding to recognize, follow and be grateful for the path you have for each of us. We pray and praise in the name of Jesus, our Lord, amen