

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus,
To SERVE those God has placed in our path.
- CG Mission Statement

Icebreaker

What is your favorite meal to eat over the holidays?

Worship: Psalm 50:9-15

(Read the poem or a Scripture passage to meditate on)

Practice lectio divina (sacred reading) by attentively reading Galatians 2:20 aloud several times. Enter into a time of worship through prayer by using a word or a phrase from the passage.

Text for Discussion: Philippians 4:10-23

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

“Contentment is an inward condition of the soul, a quiet frame of mind, which surrenders to and delights in God’s wise disposal in every condition.” We always have the choice to give thanks, regardless of our circumstances. Though we cannot change the painful moments of our past, we decide whether the poison of resentment has its way. We may complain and grumble... or we can choose contentment.

God’s power is available to us and operative in us only to the measure we feel and experience our need of it. And the only way to experience that need is through difficulties, contradictions, humiliations... all the soul’s burdens. So we must take heart in those seasons; God is training us to trust and rely on Him rather than our own feeble strength. We must patiently learn to be still in these moments of surrender – to be content because God alone is sufficient.

If this is achievable, how do we get there? Paul offers several mile markers on the road to contentment. Together, they offer a portrait of a contented heart:

An awareness of God’s comforting presence. Even when He seems distant or absent or silent, our Father is with us. No matter who has forsaken us, the Lord will take us in. We are not on this journey alone. “The Lord is near” (v5).

Learn how to pray (v6-7). Fear is the expectation that something bad is going to happen. So many live under this oppressive weight, yet whenever we are anxious, we can be absolutely sure that this isn’t God’s will. He wants us to have peace and find rest in Him. And the only way not to worry about anything is to pray about everything. Peaceful hearts are praying hearts.

The importance of a disciplined life (v8-9). We must train ourselves to set and fill our minds with God’s promises. We must learn to talk back to our circumstances – things we have no control over – with what we can be sure of: God’s word and God’s promises.

Friendship and community (v14-18). Contentment is a solitary endeavor. We can’t look for it outside of ourselves. It takes time to learn to be still. And yet, we cannot do any of this without community. We deeply need a group we can

be ourselves with, where we can (and do!) share our needs and fears. This will lead us to a place of quiet we never could have reached alone.

A great confidence in God's lavish goodness toward us (v19). We all feel shame from time to time – that intensely painful experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love. The only way to counteract shame is an awareness that we are worthy and that we do belong. But where does that come from? The Gospel offers confidence in God's personal care for us. Because of Jesus, we are free to admit we are flawed... but also free to belong and to be worthy of love.

Joy: cheerful confidence in God's presence to comfort and His power to deliver. In every circumstance, Paul chose joy. Nothing could take that from him. He resolved to be joyful, and so can we. As GK Chesterton wrote, we "have been forced to be happy about little things, but sad about the big ones. Nevertheless, I offer my last dogma defiantly: We are more ourselves when joy is the fundamental thing in us, and grief the superficial. Melancholy should be an innocent interlude, a tender and fugitive frame of mind. Praise should be the permanent pulsation of the soul. Joy is the uproarious labor by which all things live." Joy is who we were created to be and what we were created to do.

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

What was Paul's secret to contentment and what things would you need to do to adopt this view?

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

- What is something that stood out to you in this sermon and why?
 - Was there anything in this sermon that you would like to discuss?
- What does it mean to be content?
 - What circumstances most undo our contentment?
- How had Paul learned to be content? Read 2 Corinthians 1:8-10; 12:8-10; 1 Timothy 6:6-8.
 - How does Paul's view of contentment compare to the modern world's view of contentment?
 - Do you usually see God's presence (vs. 5) in whatever condition or situation you find yourself in or do you tend to see chance, fortune, enemies, injustice or something else?
 - What would it be like to practice and know contentment even when life is hard?
- In verse 13, Paul says that he can "do all things through him who gives me strength." What does "all things" refer to in context?
 - In times of need or plenty, when have you been able to experience God's strength (vs. 13) and supply (vs. 19) in your life?
 - Discuss the idea that contentment takes time, that it is a process that requires highs and lows, pains and burdens to attain abiding peace and joy.
 - What was Paul's secret to contentment and what things would you need to do to adopt this view?
- What does this passage teach us about the value of being in community?
 - Have you ever experienced a community like this or been a part of one like this?
 - How can we help each other through the ups and downs of life and the value of being content through it all?
- Paul repeats a few ideas in this chapter: advancing the Gospel, suffering for Christ, rejoicing, and learning contentment. Which of these impacts you the most today, and why?
 - What is something you most want to remember from this passage?

Prayer

Write down the names of yet-to-believe friends on 3x5 cards, one name per card. Write a brief description of how to pray for the needs of each person. Hand out the cards and pray in groups of 2 or 3 over the names. Collect them at the end of the meeting so that they can be redistributed to pray again at the next meeting.

Experiment of the Month

(A suggestion for engagement in following the way of Jesus this week)

Spiritual Formation Experience:

For the next few weeks in your personal worship time, use an online concordance to do a Bible search on the things God's people are called to be thankful for. Make a list of your discoveries, journal your reflections and life applications. Share this study with your family or community group at Thanksgiving.

Missional Experiment:

Pray for non-believers over the holiday season. Write some of your specific prayers in a journal with the hope that one day you might share the prayer journal with the person you have been praying for.