

Life Verses: Endurance

Philippians 4:10-13

Never Really Satisfied

Philip Parham tells the story of a rich industrialist who was disturbed to find a fisherman sitting lazily beside boat. *“Why aren’t you out there fishing?”* he asked.

“Because I’ve caught enough fish for today,” said the fisherman. *“Why don’t you catch more fish than you need?”* the rich man asked. *“What would I do with them?”* the man responded.

“You could earn more money and buy a better boat. Then you could go deeper and catch more fish. You could purchase better nets and catch even more fish. Soon you’d have a whole fleet of boats and be rich like me.”

The fisherman responded, *“Then what would I do?”* *“Well,”* said the industrialist, *“you could sit down and enjoy life.”*

“What do you think I’m doing right now?” asked the fisherman.

Who do you identify with?

There’s something unsettling about that story because we know in our heart of hearts we are more like the industrialist than we are the fisherman. We also realize that the fisherman may very well be on to something.

Let’s face it, you and I are all too driven. Enough never seems to be enough. We’re never really satisfied.

Interestingly, the illusive dreams of our discontent make contentment the most illusive dream of all.

The Key to Contentment

Paul writes about such things in Philippians 4:10-13

Paul is under house arrest in Rome while awaiting an audience with Caesar. From jail he writes some of the churches he helped established.

He is particularly desirous to write to his beloved friends in Philippi. The church there is very much the apple of his eye. One of the reasons he wrote was his desire to express thanks for an offering the church sent him in appreciation for his work and ministry.

“Thanks for your concern,” he writes. *“It’s not that I’m in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstance.”*

That’s an interesting stance for a fellow who’s in prison. Who in his/her right mind would be content with jail?

“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty.” We can certainly relate. We too have known the ups and downs of life.

Paul’s next thought though is not one everybody can claim. *“I have **learned**,”* he says, *“the **secret** of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.”*

Paul had learned something very important—the key to being content.

In the rough and tumble of life Paul had *“**learned**”* a very valuable lesson, a lesson about how God’s strength can inform the way we deal with the everyday circumstance of life.

Satisfied and Content

It’s not that Paul didn’t care what happened. He was simply able to meet what happened in a different way. His was a stance of faith—first, last, and everywhere in between.

During Paul’s day, the Stoics were prominent. You’ve heard of the Stoics. They lived life by eliminating all emotion from life to the place where they didn’t care what happened.

That’s no way to live. We’re much too engaged to live life so apathetically. We care way too much and so did Paul.

When Paul spoke about being content, it certainly wasn’t because he didn’t care. His contentment struck much deeper than that.

Paul’s sufficiency rested squarely in God. He could face anything, because in every situation he had Christ.

“I can do all things in Christ Jesus who strengthens me,” he said.

Paul would be the first to assert that the one who walks with Christ can cope with anything.

Hear him at other places.

II Corinthians 4:8 he writes, *“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed.”*

Romans 8:38-39 he offers this triumphant note, *“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

I have had the honor to travel to Africa a couple of times to help out with a mission group called Helping Hearts and Hands. They support orphans in a village an hour or so outside of Nairobi, Kenya.

Africa is a wonderful place with beauty beyond compare. The village looks out on The Great Rift Valley. The view will take your breath away.

The scenic beauty aside, I find myself struck by the people, particularly the children. Everyone seems so happy. The smiles on their faces are genuine. There is a contentment to the people there that is undeniable.

Theirs is a pretty meager existence compared to ours, yet they remain content. They basically have nothing when it comes to worldly possessions.

Their faith is strong though. They know from firsthand experience that God always provides.

They experience that day in and day out. They trust in God’s good work and, by so doing, seem to be released from the press that so often characterizes our lives.

Divine Contentment and Our Discontent

The ups and downs of the economy, if anything, teach us that basing our contentment on things is a slippery slope. Things, at best, are fleeting in nature.

Contentment, true contentment, divine contentment, comes not so much by what we have, but another way. Plenty or want has little to do with the contentment God offers.

The divine contentment God offers strikes to the very depth of our souls.

Let's face it, there's a dark side to all of this. The discontent of our lives is at cross purposes with the divine contentment God offers in Christ. It's the exact opposite of what Paul refers to in Philippians 4.

The seeds of our discontent develop over a lifetime. They become like weeds that choke out every bit of life.

Sometimes things get so confused we don't even know what we want. Small children can be that way, even while they sit in what seems like an ocean of toys.

The story is told of a man who wanted to move into a larger, nicer home. He contacted a realtor, put his home on the market, and an advertisement was put in the paper.

The next day the man took out the classifieds and began looking for his perfect home. To his amazement he found just what he was looking for. Immediately, he called his realtor and read him the ad. "Sir," he said, "that's the ad for your home."

What is it about us that causes us to do such things? Why are we so unsettled about our possessions? Why is it that we feel like we've got to "*keep up with the Jones's*"?

Maybe our esteem or lack thereof plays into it. We feel like we have to put on a show in order to convince others, if not ourselves, that we aren't as bad as we think.

Maybe greed is more our master and we just can't shake it.

Whatever, we'd do well to consider the divine contentment that so often eludes us.

I figure if we dig deep enough we will eventually find God. Ultimately, he alone can bring contentment.

I Can Do All Things

"I can do all things in Christ Jesus who strengthens me."

That's an oft-quoted, if not an oft-memorized verse. It's a favorite for many and one of those life verses that for me has really made a difference.

The Fellowship of Christian Athletes champions this verse and has inspired more than a few young people.

I've found it printed on tons of t-shirts. It's a verse that's oft-printed on t-shirts worn by runners.

In some of the races I've run I've been known to settle in behind someone who has that printed on the back of their shirt, just to get a little inspiration.

I fear that the phrase "I can do all things" puts a little more emphasis on the "I" and what we can do, rather than upon Christ and what he can do.

The verse becomes more a matter of self-motivation, rather than a resting in Christ's wonderworking power to help us face whatever challenge might come our way.

I Can Endure All Things

I have been coming at this verse a bit differently as of late.

Ben Witherington, Professor of New Testament at Asbury Seminary and a good friend, had helped me make the shift.

Ben attends Centenary. He's there pretty much every Sunday. In the interest of full disclosure there were more than a few Sundays when I'd ask myself while preaching, "I wonder what Ben is thinking." Ben was always very gracious.

One Sunday though Ben made a bee-line to me to offer a word of correction. I had quoted Philippians 4:13 that day. "*I can **do** all thing through him who strengthens me.*"

Ben was quick to say that most of the translations are wrong at this point. "It's a travesty," he said. "Instead of 'I can **do** all things,' the better translation is 'I can **endure** all things.' It ties better to what Paul just said about contentment."

"I can **endure** it all," says Paul. "Whether well-fed or hungry, experiencing a lot or a little, it's all of little matter, since Christ is at work in my life and his strength helps me face whatever comes my way. Christ's presence makes the supreme difference in my life

and because of that I am content. After all, what happens on the inside is so much more important than what happens on the outside.”

When We Put Our Trust in Christ. . .

When our focus is on Christ, the things of this world, those things that leave us so discontented and unfulfilled, take a backseat.

When we put our trust in Christ and look to him to faithfully provide, we become much more contented.

- People become more important than things.
- Relationships trump possessions.
- We’re not nearly as concerned about the prevailing winds of the economy and certainly not nearly as concerned about the Jones’.
- There’s joy, even in the simplest things.

On one my visits to Africa, we did a craft with the kids at one of the schools. It involved a few pieces of paper that were held together by one of those metal braids that you and I simply take for granted.

The children enjoyed the craft and took great pride in what they did.

The next day I noticed something. Pretty much everybody had one of those braids pierced through their sweater. They were wearing them like we would a diamond broach or diamond lapel pin. They couldn’t have been any more proud or thankful.

Contented, even in the simplest things, all because there is a supreme focus upon Christ and not so much the things of this world.

*“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. I can **endure** everything through him who gives me strength.”*