

Enough

Philippians 4:10-14

Extravagant Grace, Part 5

An article in the Atlantic magazine a few years ago revealed how much has changed over the past 100 years of invention and technology advancements. It also noted how the human heart hasn't really changed. In fact, things once considered luxuries have now become necessities. The magazine article illustrated the point by observing:

- In the year 1900, 90% of our country's households did not have electricity, a stove or a telephone.
- In 1915, 90% percent of the families in our country did not own an automobile
- In 1930, 90% did not own a refrigerator or a washing machine;
- In 1945, 90% didn't have air conditioning inside their homes;
- In 1960, 90% didn't own a dishwasher or color TV;
- In 1975, 90% didn't own a microwave;
- In 1990, 90% of the people in our country didn't own a cell phone or have access to the internet.

How in the world did people survive without cars or refrigerators or the internet? The article went on to write, "Today, at least 90% of our country has electricity, a stove, a washing machine, an automobile, color TV's, air conditioning, dishwashers, internet and cell phones. And now we know . . . it isn't enough.ⁱ

It is still not enough. Add to that the fact that experiences now are weighed differently. One writer for the New York Times wrote that most people today can't be satisfied with normal stuff – or

an ordinary life. He writes, every meal has to be extraordinary; every friendship amazing; every concert superb, every sunset celestial, every movie has to be a stunning epoch . . . nothing can be normal.ⁱⁱ

Christian author, Michael Horton responded to that Times article by adding, "Your marriages has to be made in heaven, even though you're living on earth; your kids have to make the dean's list and study in the best schools; your past work experience needs to be brilliant or ground breaking if you ever hope to get ahead; and if you stop long enough to vacation, it needs to be an unforgettable package at an amazing resort . . . with non-stop fun for the whole family."

The truth is we just can't get enough. Dennis Johnson wrote, tongue in cheek that the economic health of our country depends on the cultivation of discontent.ⁱⁱⁱ

The problem didn't start with us, or, our culture. It actually began at the beginning of human history. Adam and Eve lived in an amazing paradise; a world of innocence, beauty and harmony. They had everything they needed . . . until Satan came along – he wasn't satisfied either – and began the cultivation of discontent.

What was it that drew Adam and Eve's hearts away from God? What was it that seduced them into rebellion and unbelief? Simply put – they wanted more. And Satan, who didn't have enough, either – simply came along and convinced their eager hearts – they simply did not have enough.

Jason Lehman expresses the discontent in our world and in our own hearts when he penned this poem:

It was spring,
But it was summer I wanted.
The warm days,
And the great outdoors.
It was summer,
But it was autumn I wanted.
The colorful leaves,
And the cool, dry air.

It was autumn,
But it was winter I wanted.
The beautiful snow,
And the joy of the holiday season.

It was winter,
But it was spring I wanted.
The warmth
And the blossoming of nature.

I was a child,
But it was adulthood I wanted.
The freedom,
And the respect.

I was 20,
But it was 30 I wanted.
To be mature,
And sophisticated.

I was middle aged,
But it was 20 I wanted.
The youth,
And the free spirit.

Then I retired,
And it was middle age I wanted.
The presence of mind,
Without limitations.

My life is now nearing the end.
And I never got what I wanted.^{iv}

The Puritan, Thomas Watson, wrote 300 years ago, discontent dislocates the soul; it dries the brain; it corrodes the comfort of life and it wastes the spirit away.^v

In his very personal letter to beloved friends, an old Apostle, who is nearing the end of his life and

ministry, speaks to this subject of contentment. He even informs them that he has found the secret to this rather elusive virtue. Take your copy of the New Testament and turn to *Philippians chapter 4* – and where we left off in our last study – at *verse 10*. ***But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. 11. Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. 12. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. 13. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. 14. Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction.***

What I want to do is pull from this text 4 words, by way of observation – and four principles that lead the way to capturing this challenging – this godly and mature virtue we call contentment.

1. The first word is gratitude.

And the first principle is this – **appreciate whatever you have!** Paul has already told the Philippians in *verse 4 to rejoice in the Lord always* – and now here in *verse 10* he practices what he preaches. Notice again at *verse 10* – ***But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly.***

Hey, what does Paul have to rejoice greatly over? He's chained to praetorian guards, under house arrest, eating a rationed, meager diet, without many friends and for the most part forgotten by the church.

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly – why Paul? Because Paul is focusing on what he has, not what he lacks. And what does he have? Notice further – ***at last you have revived your concern for me – indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity.***

In our next session, I want to explore their support for Paul a little more carefully, but for now, you need to know that Epaphroditus has arrived in Rome with some money for Paul's needs.

And Paul rejoices over this gift and what it represented in their care for him. Paul actually describes their concern with a word translated here ***revived*** – ***you have revived your concern for me*** – the word for ***revived*** refers to flowers *blooming again*.^{vi}

In other words, to Paul, their gift was like fresh flowers that had just begun to bloom. And Paul begins to *rejoice greatly in the Lord*, because for Paul here in his rented quarters, where he's under house arrest, it has just turned into a garden, in full bloom. Adam and Eve lived in a garden and it wasn't enough – Paul is living in chains – and it has become to him a garden.

Appreciate whatever you have, and you are on your way to learning contentment.

By the way, Paul doesn't mention here why the Philippians *lacked opportunity* to help him earlier. It's possible that they were having their own severe trials as they underwent extreme poverty – *2 Corinthians 8* informs us; it could have been Paul's imprisonment in Rome which made him inaccessible to the Philippians.^{vii}

We're not told. And listen, it might be that Paul is simply choosing to think and speak the best of them. As if to say, I know you would have sent help earlier, but I'm sure it wasn't possible . . . I'm sure you didn't have an opportunity and that's okay!

But think of what Paul could have written – he could have majored on his suffering and the silence and the lack of support and his personal deprivation and his long wait for a word or a gift from others. I probably would have written, "It's about time!"

The person with a discontented heart is usually convinced that everything he does for God is more than plenty and everything God does for him is too little . . . and usually too late.

Paul has every reason to believe all of that! But watch him here . . . he is demonstrating contentment by choosing to rejoice in whatever he has. Gratitude!

2. The second key word is responsibility.

And here's the principle. Not only should we appreciate whatever we have; **we should apply whatever we learn**. Paul writes further in *verse 11*. *Not that I speak from want [or need] for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I have learned to be content*. The verb Paul uses informs us that he learned it by means of experience – over time.^{viii}

- Which means Paul had to apply God's truth that he learned to whatever he experienced in life.
- Which means Paul didn't get contentment automatically

- Which means we don't automatically get contented with life just because we're saved.
- Which means if Paul had to learn contentment, so do we.

For Paul, it grew . . . over a lifetime . . . as he faced adverse situations – in finances, health, relationships – learning to apply the truth of who God was and what God said no matter what he faced – learning to grip tightly – not to his expectations of what he thought *oughtta* happen, but gripping tightly to the grace of God in the midst of *whatever* happened.

The word Paul uses here for *content – I have learned to be content* – is a word that refers to someone – now follow this – someone whose resources are within him so that he doesn't depend on substitutes around him.^{ix}

In other words, contentment isn't created by a salary package; or a title; or health; or popularity; it doesn't depend on a retirement plan or smart kids or a big garage or a stocked tool shed. Those are external – and they come and go like the ocean's tide.

Christ-centered contentment, one author wrote on this text, is not preinstalled in our hearts, like a software program preloaded into a new computer. You have to add it to the programming.^x

Contentment is not gained externally, it is grown internally. And we have a responsibility in the matter!

The Apostle Peter writes along these lines as he encourages the believer to apply all diligence and add to your faith, moral excellence; and add to moral excellence, knowledge; and add to knowledge, self-control and add to self-control perseverance and on and on (*1 Peter 1*).

Keep in mind that the idea of *learning* in biblical terms is never related to simply learning the truth, but in applying the truth – which translates knowledge into wisdom.

Which is why, in biblical terms, the opposite of wisdom is not stupidity – the opposite of wisdom is disobedience. Refusing to apply what you're in the process of learning.

This is something then, according to Paul's own testimony that he learned over a lifetime of practice. And that's our responsibility too. Let's make sure we're doing the homework and getting the lessons right.

One pastor wrote that he wanted to teach his children contentment and also financial stewardship

so he taught them the envelope system. When we gave them an allowance, they would put it in envelopes labeled “Give,” “Save,” “Spend,” and so on. He writes, I thought I was teaching them that life was actually more than money – and I thought they were getting it until one afternoon. I came home from work and I had a Band-Aid on my arm.

My daughter, who at that time was a bright, second grader, asked me, “Why do you have that Band-Aid on your arm?” I didn’t want to alarm her, but thought that she was certainly old enough to get an explanation. I told her that I had gotten a medical exam that day so that I could buy a life insurance policy. She asked, “What’s a life insurance policy?” I explained, “Well, Daddy loves you so much and loves the family so much, if anything were to happen to me, it would provide \$250,000 dollars.”

Her eyes got really wide. I knew she was worried, until she looked up at me and said, “A piece?”^{xi}

Let’s get to it! Thanks Dad! This pastor wrote, I’m not sure the right lessons were getting through. Contentment is not a gift . . . it’s a lesson to be learned; it’s an assignment. It’s something you fight for as you wage war against the temptation to reach for more – to envy others, to fixate on the uncomfortable and inconvenient and sometimes the downright wrong circumstances that surround you.^{xii}

Contentment is practicing the art of keeping a light touch on external substitutes – that cannot satisfy – but a strong grip on the grace of God that has been lavished on you (Ephesians 1:8); being grateful for what you have and applying what you’ve learned.

Charles Spurgeon wrote on this text, [Contentment] is not something that may be exercised naturally, but a science that is acquired gradually. Brother and sister, hush that complaint, as natural as it is, and continue as a diligent student in the College of Contentment.^{xiii}

Stay in school! Practice the assignments of gratitude . . . do the homework of responsibility.

3. There’s a third word that comes to mind in this text – and it’s the word, acceptance:

Not only should you appreciate whatever you have; And apply whatever you learn. Thirdly, accept wherever you are

Notice further in *verse 12. I know how to get along with humble means* – this refers to a humbling or demeaning status in life; *And I also know how to live in prosperity* – this words means to literally overflow with things.^{xiv}

Now notice; *in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry* – that is, being at times stuffed with food and at other times starving for food – *both of having abundance and suffering need.*

- Paul moves us through his personal testimony of extreme circumstances – just read his expanded personal testimony to the Corinthians believers where he gives the details of hunger and thirst, being beaten and homeless, treated as the scum and refuse of the world (2 Corinthians 4:8-12);
- Where we, Paul writes later, as servants of God experienced afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, sleepless nights and hunger (2 Corinthians 6:4-5);
- Still later, Paul writes, Five times I received forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day adrift at sea, on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness . . . in toil and hardship, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure (2 Corinthians 11).

Listen, Paul was the last guy on the planet you would ever expect as an older man to have learned contentment. The average Christian would have resigned long ago, assuming God was either angry with them or tired of them. I mean it was one calamity after another; one life-threatening episode after another; one sleepless night with an empty growling stomach after another; one accident at sea after another.

But all of that was considered by Paul to be externals – substitutes to the typical version of contentment – and because of that, these externals could not rewrite his internal conviction.

Paul had learned that the Christian life is not a series of accidents; it is a series of appointments . . . and assignments.^{xv}

As our Divine Tutor teaches us contentment. So Paul can be both positive and realistic; notice *verse*

14 – Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction. That word for affliction refers to intense pressure . . . trouble.^{xvi}

Paul was a realist. He didn't shy away from describing the challenges of the Christian experience. He has already mentioned in this letter his tears and at the same time he demonstrates incredible joy . . . all in the same letter.

How? By developing the practices of gratitude, responsibility, acceptance – and now –

4. Fourthly, dependence.

Appreciate whatever you have; Apply whatever you learn. Accept wherever you are; And now finally, Abandon to Christ whatever you do.

Did you notice Paul added something in this text. Earlier he had simply said, "***I have learned***". But here in **verse 12** he writes, ***I have learned the secret.***

Paul actually uses a rare word, found only here in the New Testament, to depict this process of learning. The original word was a common technical term taken from the Greek mystery religions when they initiated someone through rituals.^{xvii}

In fact, you can translate Paul's statement here to read, "I have been initiated."^{xviii} In other words, Paul uses a word that his world would readily relate to someone who is taken behind closed doors and given a better understanding of their religion.^{xix}

Now Paul isn't suggesting that growing in Christ means you have to learn secret passwords, and secret handshakes and all kinds of top secret stuff in order to grow in Christ.

What he is doing here is effectively saying, "Here's the insight from being on the inside – this is the secret I have learned and practiced over all these years as an initiate in the gospel – and it's a secret I'm making public – I'm putting it into print – here's the secret – **verse 13 – *I can do all things, through Him – that is Christ – who strengthens me.***

There it is . . . that's the inside scoop for the growing disciple to learn contentment: acquiesce to Christ – abandon to Christ whatever you attempt to do.

This happens to be one of the most quoted, embroidered, calligraphied, needlepointed, painted, magnetized, scrapbooked verses in all the Bible.^{xx}

And most often it is taken out of context.

Would you notice that Paul does not write here, "I can do everything through Christ . . . or . . . I can do anything I want through Christ.

This is not the pop Christian motivational speaker who says, "You can do anything you want if you put your mind to it and pray while you're at it . . . because you can do anything you really want to do if you believe in yourself and ask Jesus to help you too.

One of my favorite Hebrew words for that comes to mind and it's pronounced – ba-lo-ney. That works in a Disney movie – "Just believe in yourself and you can do anything."

The problem is, the church has baptized Disney into Christianity by saying here, "Just believe in Jesus and you can do anything you really want."

That isn't what Paul is saying at all. This verse is the inside scoop on Paul's learning curve.

He isn't saying, "I can do anything – or I can do everything" – Paul is saying, "I can do all things through Christ" and what are the all things he has in mind? He just described them.

I can suffer hardship – I can go hungry without resentment – I can handle an overflowing cup with balance – I can hold the lowest humble status on the food chain – I can be stuffed with food and I can be starving for food – I can be content in all things – how? Through the strength of the indwelling Christ within me.

As I have learned to abandon to Him everything I am and everything I do – I find in Him the strength to do whatever He wants.^{xxi}

Here's the promise – God is effectively promising to give us the strength to do whatever He asks us to do.

So what is God asking you to do?

- Where has He placed you today?
- What challenge are you facing this week?
- What heartaches are you carrying?
- What pressures are you facing?
- What losses are you suffering?
- What promotion have you experienced?
- What abundance do you need to handle with balance and wisdom?

God planned that for you and He can empower you as you depend in your weakness upon His strength; when you in your inability depend on His ability.

Does this verse promise that Christians can do anything they want to do? No. Here's the secret: God promises that we you can do everything He calls you to do by depending on His indwelling person and power.

I can do all things through Christ – is the same thing as saying, I can do nothing without Christ.

Here's the inside scoop – Christ is on the inside! He indwells you . . . and will empower you when you abandon to Him everything you are not – and everything you cannot – for His strength alone. Think of it this way. If Albert Einstein were to inhabit my body and take over my mind, I'd be able to breeze through Algebra One – in fact, I could throw problems up on the board for my High School teacher and say, Try to solve that one!

If Picasso could move into my body and take over my hands, I would be able to paint something no one would be able to understand but still buy for 30 million dollars.

If Mozart could move into my body and if I abandoned to him the control of my imagination, my mind and my fingers, I could write an amazing Sonata . . . or even a symphony.

If Michelangelo could move into my body, I would be able to take a block of marble and turn it into a sculptured masterpiece.^{xxii}

The secret to contentment is not trying harder, but inviting Christ to take over . . . to take over your hands and your imagination and your mind and your body.

He has given you Himself. And you abandon – you acquiesce – whatever you do. You accept wherever you are. You apply whatever you learn. And you appreciate whatever you have.

And in end you realize, you have Him. And when you have Him, you have His authority, and His protection and His power and His wisdom.

I close with this. The great missionary explorer, David Livingstone, served in Africa from 1840 until his death in 1873.

David Livingstone was eager to travel into the uncharted lands of Central Africa to preach the gospel.

On one occasion, he arrived at the edge of a large territory that was ruled by a tribal chieftain there in Central Africa.

According to tradition, the chief would come out to meet him; and after their meeting, if all went well, Livingstone would be free to travel throughout that territory; but only after an exchange was made.

According to custom, the chief would choose any item of Livingstone's personal property that caught his fancy and keep it for himself, while giving the missionary something of his own in return.

Livingstone had few possessions with him, but at their encounter he obediently spread them all out on the ground—his clothes, his books, his watch, and even the goat that provided him with milk (since chronic stomach problems kept him from drinking the local water).

To his dismay, the chief took his goat. In return, the chief gave him his carved stick, shaped like a walking stick – only curved at the top.

Livingstone was really disappointed. In fact, it wasn't long before he was complaining to God about this tradition, this chief and this ridiculous and useless walking stick.

What could it ever do for him compared to the goat that kept him well and his digestive system working properly?

Later, as they traveled along, one of the men explained to David, “What you have been given is not an ordinary walking cane. It is the king's very own scepter, and with it you will find entrance to every village in our country. The king has honored you greatly.”

Sure enough . . . Central Africa was effectively opened to David Livingstone . . . and successive evangelists ultimately followed him and wave after wave of conversions occurred throughout that land.

The author adds this parting application: sometimes, in our disappointment over what we don't have, we fail to appreciate the significance of what we have – what we have been given in the good and gracious providence of God.^{xxiii}

According to Paul here, God hasn't just given us a walking stick – in fact, He hasn't even just given us a royal scepter. He has given us Himself – the King Himself resides in us.

And because of that, we can say something that Adam and Eve couldn't say; we can say something that Christians throughout the ages have struggled to say . . . we can say, “Enough.”

Enough! We have, in Christ, enough.

© Copyright 2016 Stephen Davey
All rights reserved.

-
- i Adapted from Derik Thompson, *The 100-Year March of Technology*, The Atlantic (4-7-2012)
- ii Adapted from Michael Horton, *Ordinary* (Zondervan, 2014), p. 53
- iii Adapted from Dennis E. Johnson, *Philippians* (P & R Publishing, 2013), p. 283
- iv Adapted from Sam Gordon, *Philippians: An Odyssey of Joy* (Ambassador, 2004), p. 169
- v Ibid, p. 172
- vi David Garland, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 12: Philippians* (Zondervan, 2006), p. 257
- vii G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians* (Eerdmans, 2009), p. 309
- viii Warren W. Wiersbe, *Philippians: Be Joyful* (Victor Books, 1978), p. 121
- ix Ibid.
- x Johnson, p. 292
- xi John Ortberg, *Ten Financial Commandments* PreachingToday.com
- xii Adapted from Johnson, p. 295
- xiii Adapted from Charles Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2011 edition), p. 94
- xiv Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Regency, 1976), p. 562
- xv Adapted from Wiersbe, p. 123
- xvi Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Regency, 1976), p. 562
- xvii Hansen, p. 312
- xviii Johnson, p. 293
- xix Hansen, p. 312.
- xx R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians* (Crossway, 2007), p. 185
- xxixxi *Life Application Bible: Philippians, Colossians & Philemon* (Tyndale, 1995), p. 120
- xxii Adapted from J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Joy of Living: A Study of Philippians* (Lampighter Books, 1973), p. 229

