

April 30/May1, 2022

**A Heart of Contentment**  
*Real Change: Getting to the Heart of It*  
**Philippians 4:4-20**  
Pastor Josh Luse

We have just started up in a new series that we're calling *Real Change: Getting to the Heart of It*. And now no doubt every one of us has things in our life that we wish were different, that we wish were not there, that we wish didn't look the way that they did, or things that we wish were in our lives that we could cultivate. And so, we want to dig into Scripture to figure out how to accomplish that, how to really see real change in our life. Because for some of us, it's been years and years that we've wanted to see that change and yet, it doesn't seem to happen. We realize part of it is, in fact, all of it, is directed at our heart.

So, all of us go into the doctor and the doctor asks us questions, and we assess where we're at. So let's do a little heart check right now, here this morning. Okay, I'm going to ask you a couple questions. And in your heart, you kind of decide where you're at with this? Do you find yourself becoming more irritated or more at peace lately? Do you find yourself cultivating more contentment or getting more discontent in the last few weeks, months? Maybe a year? How about this? Do you find yourself more irritable, more frustrated? Or do you find yourself more joyful, more at peace? Maybe one last question. If you could just change that one thing, if this—fill in the blank—would just change, then everything would be okay. Go ahead and hold that, whatever that is that you put in the blank, and let's turn to Philippians, Chapter 4 and talk a little bit about what Paul has to say about contentment. Philippians chapter 4, and I'm going to start in verse 4. It says this:

**Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.** (\*ESV, Philippians 4:4)

Now, when we hear **rejoice**, we think of an interior contentment, a joy, delight in God. And it is that, but it's more than that. It's an expression, an expressive life. In fact, the people that would have first read this in Philippi, would have understood this as a public celebration. They would have times all throughout the year where they would have these events; they would have these games; they would have these shows that would honor and celebrate their gods. When they heard **Rejoice in the Lord**, the first thing that would come to their minds would be Rejoice in Caesar. and there would be all of these festivities that they would gather around, to join in and have fun celebrating Caesar.

Now for us, Paul says to **Rejoice in the Lord**. But he's not referring to Caesar is he? It's interesting that he doesn't say rejoice in circumstances because there are things that we can definitely rejoice in. There are circumstances that help us out. But as we study through Philippians today, and we're on a journey to uncover what this contentment really looks like, I'm going to give you six “C’s”, six words that start with the letter “C” that are trying their best to rob you of your contentment. They want to come in and pillage and steal and take any contentment that you might try to accomplish.

The first “C” on that list is **circumstances**. Circumstances can rob you of your contentment. Can I get an Amen? Okay, so me and three people, right? We sometimes have difficult things that happen in life, and it seems like it just sucks the contentment right out of our life. Well, before we move any farther, let's just put ourselves in Paul's shoes for just a second. As he writes this, Paul has been facing challenges, not for days, not for weeks, but for years. In fact, as the book starts out, in chapter 1, verse 28, he speaks of this outside opposition. He's continued to have all these attacks from outside the church that come at him. Not only that, just two verses earlier, in chapter 4, we find that there are disputes happening within the church, with this church that he loves. In the first chapter, verse 13, tells us that he's in prison; he's in jail. He's been put on trial for treason because he's following Jesus. If somebody knew difficult circumstances, it would be Paul, and yet what does Paul tell us? To rejoice!

There's an author; his name is Henry Cloud. He's a Christian. He wrote a book<sup>1</sup> on happiness, and he looked at a bunch of studies that researchers had done. In one of them that he started to unpack, researchers found that of all the happiness people would gain or achieve in life, only 10% of their happiness or joy will be contributed to circumstances. He'd said that they found that there would always be a bump in their joy and their happiness and their contentment. But that bump would always come back down. Where it came back down to, he called a *setpoint*. So maybe they'd get a new job; they get a new house; they'd get whatever, and that would produce some joy, some happiness and contentment. But it wouldn't last. It would always drop back down to that baseline level of contentment. What's he finding? He's finding that my contentment can't be found out there. My contentment has to do with something in here. That's what we want to continue to dive into.

So many people think contentment is found in the “what” but it's not. It's found in the “who”. And that's what Paul is telling us right here. **Rejoice in the Lord**. So many people say, “If I would just have this, then I'd be happy.” “When this happens, then I'll find contentment.” It's all circumstantial contentment. But the thing he is showing us is that that's not where contentment is found. In fact he says, “I will say it again, rejoice. I'll say it again, rejoice. I'll say it again, rejoice.” It's like he's got it on this continued loop. The thing he's trying to convey through this is, “I will live a life of continual rejoicing.” You almost get this picture of this three-year-old toddler trying to get their mom's attention and saying, “Mom...Mom...Mama...Mommy...Mom...Mom,” this loop to get your attention. It seems as though Paul is trying to repeat this over and over so that we realize he's talking about a rejoicing life all the time. But could it really be actually possible that we could continue to live a life of rejoicing, no matter the circumstances? What do you think? Do you believe that? Maybe some of you in the room right now are saying, “Absolutely not!”

We'll continue on this journey. What if the situation you're in never changes...the circumstance that you're facing never changes? Does that mean that you will live an entire life without contentment? I've found that sometimes the most difficult seasons I've walked through are the times that God has grown me and stretched me and transformed me the most. Here's the reality. The difficult circumstance that you may be in, may be because God wants to do something in you. God doesn't waste opportunities. In fact, Paul says, “Rejoice in the Lord **always**,” even when circumstances don't go the way that you would have planned them or wish that they had. Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> (Dr. Henry Cloud, *The Law of Happiness*, Publisher: Howard Books (December 2011)).

always gives us a reason to rejoice, because of what we have in Him. Maybe this is a prayer that you need to pray this week: “Jesus, help me to find my satisfaction in You, right in the middle of this circumstance, this situation. Verse 5, he goes on to say:

**Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;**

Now the word **reasonableness**, the NASB translates that “*gentle spirit*.” The NIV translates that “*gentleness*.” So, what's he talking about? You can't capture this word, just in one word. There's a plethora of words that help give us a fullness of this. But you don't find a bunch of guys sitting around going, “Yeah, that's good, gentleness. I want to work on my gentleness. Would you hold my weights for a second while I go tickle a kitten with a feather,” right? That's not really something that gets us super excited. So, what's he talking about? When he's talking about gentleness, we can start looking at this word comprehensively in the Greek, and it shows us all sorts of things. It's talking about a gentle spirit, but he's also talking about a gracious spirit, a yielding spirit, a kind spirit, a forgiving spirit.

Actually, if you look at the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and you look for this same word, you'll find it in Psalm chapter 86, verse 5, and this is what it says. “*For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving.*” You know how the NASB translates it? “*For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive.*” The word translated for this *gentleness* is ready to forgive. It's a posture. It's not that I'm just willing to extend forgiveness. It's that he's actually living in an active posture of forgiveness. There's a gracious spirit. There's a grace-filled life that's flowing through our God. And that's what he's talking about cultivating right here. It's a different kind of posture and when people get this, they're a different kind of person, aren't they? Have you met these kinds of people? There's a lightness to them. There's a joy to them. It's as though they actively live in a posture where they can interact with something deeper, content within them that allows them to extend things that just don't make sense in this world. You can often see the condition of somebody's heart, by the way that they respond when they have been wronged, when they've been hurt, or maybe when they don't see eye to eye with somebody else. But the reality is that those that have found what Paul's talking about, something in Jesus, they can actually live differently. They can forgive because they understand how much they've been forgiven. They can actually be patient, because God has been patient with them. Everyone knows God has been patient with Josh. So, I can be patient. They can actually live gracious lives in a posture actively to do that, because God extends grace constantly to them. And we don't get to pick and choose. In verse five, he says, **Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. Everyone**, not just who I want.

This leads us to the second “C” that will try to rob us of our contentment. That's **conflict**. Do you have anybody in your life right now that, if I were to say their name, you would be like, “Grrrrrr.” Your stomach would start to turn. You just think there's absolutely nothing good I can say about that person because there's nothing good about that person. You know what I'm talking about? Your friends won't even bring up their name. If somebody talks about it, they just say, “We don't talk about Bruno,” or Steve, or John or whoever it is, right? There's just this idea that if I never saw them again, that would be too soon. It's as though they've sucked the contentment and delight and joy straight out of you. But do you realize you have an active participation within that? There's something you can do. In fact, Paul talks about this, just two verses earlier, in chapter 4, verse 2. Go back and look what he says. He says:

**I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. (Vs. 2-3)**

There's some kind of dispute that's going on in the church of Philippi. These women have been actively involved with Paul in the ministry of the gospel, but something has taken place, and all of a sudden, they're at odds. In fact, the way that Paul says this, it seems as though they're not even talking to one another. So, what does he ask them to do? He asks them to **agree**. Now agree, and the NASB may say "*live in harmony*". The Greek word with this would mean "to think the same," or maybe better said, "to think on the same level". What Paul is trying to say is, "When I engage into this dispute, into this conflict, I come in on level ground. I don't use my position or my power to try to somehow get me on a different place with this person, to force them into my way of thinking or my view. I don't try to usurp, that I have more value than them. I actually show up in a way that I'm using my *reasonableness*, my gentleness. I'm actually showing up with a gracious spirit to try and engage the conflict that's taking place.

He says, **agree in the Lord**. We're going to see this phrase **in the Lord** constantly today. I think this is the key. Some people think that this is because there was a theological debate that they had within the church, and that may be so. But I think it was something more than that because I know that if I enter into a dispute or debate or some kind of conflict, on my own strength, I'm going to come in with a wrong posture. I'm going to come in with the wrong attitude. I'm pretty sure I'm going to come in with the wrong words. So, what I need in that moment is, I need Jesus to help me in my posture, I need Jesus to help me in my words, I need Jesus to help me with my attitude. Someone once said, I don't have to attend every argument that I'm invited into. And it's true. Romans 12:18 says, "*If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all people.*"

What is he saying? He's saying not all disputes can be resolved in the way that you hope because you can't control the other person. But you can control yourself with God. With God's help, you could actually enter in with the right posture. So let me just ask you right now, "Is there someone in your life that, when you think of them, there just comes this discontentment? There's this unsettled thought?" Maybe God is asking you, at this point, to go and ask for forgiveness, to apologize. Maybe he's leading you right now to think, "I've got to go have a conversation. I've got to talk to someone." Maybe for some of you, he's saying, "Just let it go. Live with a gracious spirit; just let it go." Maybe some of us this week need to pray this. "Jesus, help me to love this person that is so hard to love because I don't have any love for them. I need Your love to love them with. I can't do this on my own."

Paul seems to think that it's just not worth living a life of conflict and discontentment with others. In fact, he goes on to say, this is no way to live. He said in verse 5, **The Lord is at hand**, which means the Lord is near. He's coming back soon. Paul doesn't take sides in this dispute. He doesn't tell us much about the issue. He doesn't even tell them how to resolve it. But he is saying, "Hey, do something about it. This is no way to live." He continues on in verse 6, and he says this:

**...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.**

Now I've constantly already seen that Paul continues to use these big words. When I first got married, my wife and I decided that there were certain words that we would just call *big words*, and we would try not to use these words. It was words like *always*, and *never*, because once we entered that in the conversation, that just didn't seem to help much. "Josh, you *always* do that." I would say, "Oh, that's a big word." or, "You *never* take out the trash." "That's a big word. I didn't this week or last week. I did the week before, though." So sometimes there's these big words. Paul continues to use these. In fact, in verse four, he said, "Rejoice in the Lord *always*." And then the next verse, he says, "Let your reasonableness be known to *everyone*." And now he comes in, "Do not be anxious about *anything*." I mean, "Paul, come on, aren't there some things that I can worry about? Are there some things that deserve a little bit of my time, for worry?"

Are you like me? You worry about some of the dumbest things. About a year ago, we moved to a new home. It's a little old farm outside of town. It's something we're incredibly excited about, didn't ever expect an opportunity like this. But one of the things about me is, I love people; I get energized by people. And this church is great, because there's a lot of people, so I get to spend my whole week with people. But the way that I recharge, the way that I reenergize, is away from people. Put me on a desert island alone, and I'm a happy guy. And then I'm ready to reengage with people. Some of you guys are like, "Not me at all. Put me around everybody, and I'm fired up; I'm energized!" That's awesome! God makes all of us uniquely. This place has become a little bit of a reenergizing spot for me. I'd be with people all week, and then I'd go back home and there's space and field around us. And I'm driving over the hill, and I see a part of the grass cut down around right by our house. You know what I start to think? "Oh, no, there's going to be more people here. They're going to build a house right there. That's where we look at the sunset. What am I going to do?" None of this is in my control. I can't do anything about it. In fact, that might not even be what's happening at all. I'm not a farmer. I have no clue what's happening in this season. But what I realized is that I'm spending time worrying about these things. "I've got to plant trees. If there's a house going up there, I've got to start doing this. I got to start doing that." Who am I to try and control something I can't control, to try and worry about this? Who knows? God has given us incredible neighbors. Maybe he's putting one more great neighbor right there. Maybe this is somebody I'll end up thinking of as a lifelong friend. And yet I want to spend the mental capacity and time to worry about things that just can't change, or control. Some of us have other words that are more serious than that. But here's the reality. Anxiety is this—and don't miss this—anxiety is me internalizing my doubt that God is not big enough, that I can't trust God with this thing, that I don't know if God's going to show up for this.

Which ultimately leads us to another thing that tries to rob me of my contentment. Are you ready for this one? Write it down. It's "**Control**." And Bryan talked about it last week. He told us about the two paths that we could choose. One path we could choose is that we would worship God, that we would let God be God, and in that there was a *surrender*. But there was another path. Remember that? It was the path that told me that I could choose to try and be my own god. We found out from that story, we're not very good at being gods, are we? If I'm living a worried life, an anxious life, that's a symptom of something deeper in my heart. It's an issue of *control*. And this is the reality: I can't have control and contentment at the same time. I can either hold contentment as I let go of control and let God take the reins and trust Him, or I can come over and try to control everything and manipulate everything. But I can't have both. I've got to choose.

And that's why Paul says in this verse *to pray about it*. Because prayer is not doing nothing. Prayer is doing something, and it's powerful. Not doing something you can do, that's passivity. That's **complacency**, which is another “C” that will rob your contentment. I'm just complacent and I sit there and think, “Hey, it didn't go my way. I'm going to do nothing, then.” I'm not going to experience contentment in that moment. But as I pray about it, God starts to do things both in me and around me. Prayer is letting go of our need for control and knowing that God is at work.

There's a quote from Oswald Chambers that I've read over and over through the years and the more I read it, the more powerful it becomes in my life. He says this: “Every time we pray, our horizon is altered, our attitude to things is altered, not sometimes but every time, and the amazing thing is that we don't pray more.” Isn't that true? Every time we pray, God does something in us and through us, instructs us, shows us how we can align with Him. That's why he says in verse 7:

**And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

The literal picture that he's giving of *guarding* is soldiers marching around the walls of a city. God **will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus**, as we come to Him in prayer. That shows me the enemy isn't from outside then, is it? The enemy is the warrior in me. So, what is God asking us to do? Let go of control, to trust Him. We just read it earlier in Colossians, chapter 3, verse 15, as a whole church. “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard hearts and minds, right? Colossians 3 says this, “*And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts*”. Give over control. Here's the thing. My circumstances might not change. My health diagnosis from the doctor may not change; the other person may not change. But something starts to change in my heart, and that changes everything!

Some of you are losing sleep over things, you're worried about things, you're anxious about things. Maybe this is a prayer that you need to pray this week. “God, I'm handing over control. I'm giving You the things that I'm tempted to worry about. Will You help me not to worry? Will You help me to trust You in this situation?” He goes on to verse 8:

**Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace (There it is again.) will be with you. (Vs. 8-9)**

He tells us to think about all these things. That's a lot of *whatever's*. We're finding all sorts of whatever things to think about. The literal word for **think** means to *calculate*, means to  *dwell on*. But I could have read an opposite list of things to dwell on. He could have said this: Finally, brothers, whatever is untrue, whatever is dishonorable, whatever is unjust, whatever is scandalous, whatever is cheap, whatever is blameworthy, dwell on these things.” You find yourself at all through the week dwelling on those kinds of things? Constant noise and chatter? We find ourselves scrolling through that list constantly, don't we? The messages are constantly at the door. But he says, at times, maybe we need to just turn off the noise and think about something different.

As I read this, this week, you know what I thought? Boy, from the moment I wake up to the moment I go to sleep, I feel like I'm constantly allowing these noise messages into my life. And sometimes I've just got to shut them off. It was amazing, even as I drove around in the quietness, how God would bring to mind things I was seeing, and the ways that it would change, and it would continue to impact my attitude, and my thoughts. He says to  *dwell*  on these. Why? To dwell on these  *good*  things, so that it shapes what we do. Because the reality is: each and every one of us is being shaped every day. If you go through existence, you're going to be shaped by something. And there is a line of lies out the door that wants to shape you daily. "You don't have enough"; "You're not good enough." "If you just had this, then that would be enough."

Reminds me of the kid at the carnival. Remember going the carnival as a kid? So excited, you'd roll into town, you'd show up, and there'd be the lights. You'd walk; you'd start to smell the smells of cotton candy. You'd get some cotton candy; get a hot dog; you're chowing down. Your hands are sticky from the cotton candy. You do a couple rides. And then you see that game. It looks so fun. "If I just played that, that'd be a blast." So, you go up, you spend five bucks, and you get three rings. Remember this: you think this will be easy. All I've got to do is put a ring on that and I get one of those prizes? And you throw it. It bounces off. Another three...bounces out. Why? What's the deal with those bottles? Why are those so hard to get rings on? Another five bucks and another three rings. Try it again. Another five bucks and another three rings. All I want is just that prize now, right? I get it; I actually get it! I get the ring on; I get the prize, and they give me this little cheap plastic prize. As I'm holding this prize, I look up at the wall where there's better prizes. There are stuffed animals, and all I'll have to do is get five of these, and I could trade for one of those. So, what do I do? Five more bucks. And I'm going after, and I get this stuffed animal. But I'm not ready to walk away. Because at the very top of this ring game is a five-foot stuffed animal. And if I keep getting enough at these, I can get that. And if I get that, that would be enough! And I find myself, after a long day, finally walking home with this cheap five-foot stuffed animal that I'm dragging around. The seams are already ripping off it, and it has some kind of smell on it. And I'm starting to get a stomachache from the hot dogs and the cotton candy.

These are the lies the world continues to sell us every day. "If you just had this, that would be enough." But Paul is saying, "Hey, think differently. Think on what is just." Whenever you see those situations where something is taking place, you see somebody interact, you think that was well done, you're inviting that in. "God, I want to be the kind of person that acts in that way. Would You help me next time I have an opportunity to interact with somebody to provide that kind of justness for them? God, they just shared truth in an incredible way. Not only was it helpful, but the way that they shared that, was so kind. It was so reasonable; it was so gracious in their spirit. God, would You help me to be the kind of person that sees Your truth and that I can share it in that way?" As we see these things interact that are on this list, we start to put them into practice. Are we preaching yet? That's what God wants to start shaping and developing into our lives. And then he gets to the key I think, in chapter 4, verse 10:

**I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and**

**every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Vs. 10-13)**

So interesting, this is the first time we actually see the word **content**. And this is the only place in the whole New Testament that Paul uses this word for content. It's an interesting word. It means *self-rule* or *self-sufficiency*. In fact, it would have been a common word that the philosophers of that day or the stoics would have used. It would mean that there's somehow a way that I can achieve. I can learn a way within myself to find happiness, to find contentment.

It's no different than the self-help books that are out there right now. What's fascinating to me, is that there is a \$13.2 billion-dollar self-help industry that's estimated for this year. We're all trying to find ways to help from within ourselves to find this thing. But Paul is onto a key here. This contentment is tied to something else. It's actually tied to verse 13. It might be helpful to think of it like this. The English word for contentment comes from a Latin word *Contentus*. It means *satisfied*. That word comes from another Latin verb *Continer*. It's a verb meaning to *hold in*, or to *contain*. Kind of sounds like another word, doesn't it? *Container*. It's as though there's a picture displayed for us that our heart is a container, and what we fill it with, and choose to fill it with, will satisfy or dissatisfy our lives.

But Paul is saying there's a secret to this satisfaction, and he's talked about it all through the book of Philippians. In Philippians, chapter 1, verse 26, he says it this way, "*Glory (or rejoice) in Christ.*" Philippians 3:1, "*Rejoice in the Lord.*" Philippians 4:4, "*Rejoice in the Lord.*" Philippians 4:10, "*Rejoiced in the Lord.*" There's the key. That's what I anchored to. But it's not that alone. I participate; I join in. Do you see all the spots in this set of verses where he's saying, "*For I have learned,*" verse 12, "I know how," again he says, "*I know how.*"? Then he goes on at the end of that verse to say, "*I have learned.*" And then we get to verse 13 and he says, "*I can do.*" It's me actively choosing to participate with what God is doing, to change and join with Him in what He wants to do in and through me and my life. It's a partnership. **I can do all things through Him, who strengthens me.**

I love the way JB Phillips puts it. "*I'm ready for anything through the strength of the one who lives within me.*"<sup>2</sup> It goes on to verse 14, he says this:

**Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. (Vs. 14-18)**

What is Paul talking about here? Paul has gone on a missions' journey, and most of that journey he's been tent making. He has been self-sufficient in this. But there was a point in his journey

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where this church, Philippi, decided they would support Paul. They would free him up, give him more time to invest in ministry, and they knew of his needs. And he's telling them, "Hey, I'm grateful that you have helped out. You are the first church that supported me in this in your area." And he's grateful for that. But he's trying to tell them that it's not about the gift. He realizes that part of contentment, part of the way that I find that, is through living a generous life as they've done. Part of the way that I set my needs aside is to see the needs of others and join in generously meeting them. That's the way I combat needing the next version of *this* or the next *this* or the newest *that*. It's seeing the greater needs and joining in what God is doing there. Paul is saying, "Hey, I don't want to seem like I'm ungrateful for the gift, or that I'm trying to solicit more things or that I'm complaining about the needs that I have. It wasn't about the **complaining**, which that's actually another "C". Another thing that will try to rob your joy, if you let it, is **complaining**. That's why 1 Thessalonians 5, verses 16-17, says this, "*Rejoice always.*" Boy, that seems familiar. "*Pray without ceasing.*" Think I've heard that. "*Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*" What's the will of God for you? To give thanks in all circumstances. It doesn't say *for* all circumstances. He says give thanks *in* all circumstances. Some things are tough; some things are difficult, but there is always something that I can find to rejoice in God in, even in the midst of the worst circumstance.

My family and I have been trying to grow in this practice. So, at different times we'll go around the table and instead of doing a traditional prayer before eating, we'll say, "Hey, everyone around the table, say five things that you're grateful for. If the person before you says what you're going to say, you got to find another one. You know what? As we go around that table, we can go around more and more and more because the things to find to be grateful for in God are endless. Then to close it out, my second grader will say, "And the whole Luse family said, Amen."

What if, in your life, you started to develop a practice of being grateful? A new contentment was a challenge in my heart, so for the past three months, you know what I've been doing? I've decided that every day I'm going to audibly say something I'm grateful for out loud, whether it's to someone else, or just to myself. Sometimes I'm the crazy guy just walking going, "God, thank You for this sunset. You are amazing." I'm just talking, because at times I need to hear the things that are true so I can put them into my heart. Or, when I choose to tell somebody about something rather than complain about something, it not only does something in my heart, it does something for them. You don't find content people complaining, do you? This meal was too delicious, right?" "This chair is too comfortable." "That roadwork is too efficient." Do you find those people complaining? Contentment and complaining don't mix. Maybe for you, you need to start praying this week. "God, thank you for..." and then continue it day after day after day. Then he gets into verse 19, and he says this:

**And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.** (Vs. 19-20)

It's good to know that Paul says that our God will supply every *want*, isn't it? No, is that what he said? He didn't say that. He said every **need**. And if I trust Him, He knows what I need. What I need may not be what I want. There's a difference between that. It kind leads us to our last "C". Now I'm sure there are many more, but this "C" is **comparison**. Isn't it amazing that we always compare with people who have more? We don't compare ourselves with people who have less.

Imagine this. You're in an experiment, you're in a study where there are together a couple kids in a room. The first kid comes in the room while the parents are waiting outside. They walk over to him, and they give him this small box. They say, "You can open this up." As this kid opens it up, he starts to look in and he sees this toy, a shiny toy, a new toy. Pulls it out. A smile comes across his face. He's delighted; he's excited and starts playing with it. He says, "Thank you." He wasn't expecting anything when he walked in the room, and now he has a toy.

But there's another kid in the room. And the scientist goes over and gives him a bigger box. And as this kid opens the toy, there's a bigger toy, a shinier toy, a new toy, a better toy. And instantly what happens to the first kid? He *was* just grateful, *was* just satisfied, *was* just content. And as he walks out of the room, and his parents asked him how it went and what went on, he says, "All I got was this dumb toy." It's interesting that it happens with kids, right? Because that never happens with adults, right? Comparison is the enemy of contentment. Comparison will rob us of our joy. You know why? Because enough will never be enough, unless your enough is found in Christ alone. And if you don't anchor on that truth, you are going to live a disgruntled life, a dissatisfied life, a discontent life. And it will be miserable for you and everyone around you. You're going to be saying, "If I could just have that different spouse;" "If I could just have that job... If I could just have that trip... If I could just have this, then I'll be happy." But the thing is, it will never bring you the contentment that you desire.

That's why in Philippians chapter 3, verse 8, Paul says this, "*Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.*" The New Living translation puts it this way, "*Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*" Partnering with Jesus through this life, aligning our days with Him in every circumstance, in every situation, leaning on Him for strength starts to show us the delight that is found in Him.

Psalms 37, verse 4 says this, "*Delight yourself in the LORD, and He will give you the desires of your heart.*" He won't give you all that your heart desires, but he'll put His desires in your heart. Let me tell you this. That's better than anything you could ever desire. CS Lewis said it this way. "*It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition, when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by an offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.*"<sup>3</sup>

So, I wonder, as you sit here today, wrestling with this point of contentment in your life, has God highlighted something that has been trying to rob you of contentment? Is it a circumstance you're in? Is there a situation that's weighing down on you? Is there a conflict that's going on? Is that the control that you seek after? Is it the complacency that you've gotten yourself into? Is it your constant complaining? Is it a comparison of everyone around us? Because God desires to do a change, a real change, a change that takes place in our heart. And when that happens, that's when we get to the heart of real change.

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<sup>3</sup> CS Lewis, *The Weight of Glory, and Other Addresses*, Harper One, 2001

*God, thank You so much, that You are a God that cares about us, a God that loves us, a God that wants us to experience infinite joy and delight in You, not in other things. God, be our first love. Help us draw close to You so we understand what it looks like to fall in love with You, so the things of earth grow dim in comparison to You. God, it is our desire that You would be first and foremost in our life, so much so that we will continue to align each and every part of our day to join with You, to live out words and actions and attitudes in the same way that You would, so we reflect You, and so we start to find the patterns in life that bring deep contentment in You in any circumstance. I pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.*

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## Spring 2022 // WEEK 2

### Life Group Questions

Real Change: Getting to the heart of it. // April 30-May 1, 2022

A Heart of Contentment // Philippians 4:4-20

## Introduction

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This week Pastor Josh walked us through the challenges we face in our everyday lives, relating to conflict, circumstances, comparison, complacency and complaining. At times each of us may struggle with one or more of these issues. We experience conflict with others which causes insecurity, and our insecurity leads to discontentment. Or circumstances in our lives or the lives of others (to whom we compare ourselves) can lead to not being content and thus we complain. What is the secret to being content? How do we cultivate a heart of contentment?

To think through the main ideas in the sermon and prepare for your discussion together, we invite you to look over the questions below and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group.

## Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

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Here are some suggestions to get your conversation started:

1. How would you summarize the highs and lows of this past week?
2. Share about a time when you experienced contentment despite your circumstances.  
(Remember that contentment can be cyclical—most of us regularly have to ask the Spirit to bring us back from places of discontentment)

## Getting Started

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Transition into group discussion.

- 1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
    - a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
    - b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives
    - c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you
  - 2) Due to the lengthy passage of Scripture this week, try reading the narrative in large segments as guided by the discussion questions.
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## Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

- 1) What did you resonate with from this week's message?
  
- 2) *Read Philippians 4:10-13.* Based on the scriptures and the sermon, in your own words, what has Paul learned about the secret to being content in every circumstance?

*Read Philippians 4:14-19.* How do these verses relate to the secret of being content?

- 3) In Philippians 4:19 Paul states, "And my God will supply all of your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." **Do you live in your everyday life as if this verse is true? Please explain your answer.**
  
- 4) Many times, other things steal contentment from us. It could be circumstances, social media influences, advertising, conflict with others, worry, something that causes us to complain, or \_\_\_\_\_. *Ask the Lord to search your heart for the things that steal contentment.*  
**Would you be willing to share what you feel like the Lord revealed to you with your group?**

In what area of your life do you most struggle with contentment?

How does this week's scripture passage or the sermon encourage you in that struggle?

How can your group come around you to challenge/encourage you in this struggle?

- 5) *Read Philippians 3:8 & 4:4-9. What do you see in these verses that can help when you find yourself in a place of discontentment? (See the Personal Spiritual Exercises for specific applications.)*

## Prayer *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

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A significant part of “coming together” is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say “Amen” aloud signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the message, working through the above questions or the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus? Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?

## Personal Spiritual Exercises

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Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you along each week to strengthen your souls with suggestions and prompts. **Next week in your Life Group, take a few moments to share how either of these exercises may have changed your outlook on your daily life.**

**Exercise 1: Practicing Gratitude.** One sure way to grow in contentment is to practice gratitude for every good thing God has given to us. Every day this week, list 10 or more things you are thankful for, things that brought you happiness, things that might be gifts from the Lord. Try to come up with new things every day. Write them down at the end of each day and share your list with your group.

**Exercise 2: Practicing Generosity.** One of the antidotes to discontent is generosity. The best way to learn to “get along with humble means” is to empty your hands of something. This week step out in faith in the area of contentment: Prayerfully give something (money or possessions or time) away this week, with the goal of learning to be content in whatever circumstances you are in.

If this makes you nervous, talk to the Lord about the truth that “[He] will supply all of your needs...” (His generosity will always exceed yours.)