



From Craving to Contentment

Brian Long January 16, 2022

Text: Philippians 4:10-20

Big Idea: To be a faithful steward you must be transformed from craving what you don't have to contentment with what God provides.

Probably most of us have seen an episode or two of shows like Extreme Home Makeover, Home Town, Fixer Upper, or even personal makeover shows like Biggest Loser. It's always shocking to see the transformations that occur in homes, in bodies or in hair and wardrobe changes. The before and after pictures are always stunning as they show what the home or person looked like before the transformation and then after. The transformations are always a huge improvement.

There is potential huge improvement in our lives as well when we meet Jesus and begin to journey with him. In our recent Reclaimed series, we learned that when a person gives their life to God by placing their faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit moves into their lives and begins an extreme character makeover effort that we are called to cooperate with in our lives. He begins to reclaim all sorts of areas of our lives to move us from sinful, self-destructive ways of living to godly, life-constructive ways of living.

As I mentioned last week, of all the reclamation projects that Jesus leads Christians through, often transforming how we manage our financial resources is perhaps the most difficult transformation we undergo.

Because of this, Last week we began a new series I'm calling Stewardship Reclaimed. We discovered that for you and me to become faithful stewards each of us needs to be transformed from idolatry to an exclusive love for God. This week I want us to consider another aspect of the stewardship transformation that needs to occur in you and me if we're going to be transformed into faithful, godly stewards: *From craving what is not possessed to contentment with what God provides.*

From craving what is not possessed to contentment with what God provides.

This is another challenging transformation God is seeking to develop in us. Let's face it, contentment can be elusive. Our natural proneness is to become dissatisfied with what we currently have, what we currently possess. Our natural proneness is to want more. The Bible teaches that the relentless craving to possess something one doesn't have, is rooted in our sin nature. It's rooted in what Paul calls "the flesh" or our old nature with its godless, self-obsessed desires.

Ben Gill, in his book *Stewardship: The Biblical Basis for Living* writes, *"Flesh is an all-pervasive drag on spiritual life, a gravity that pulls down the spiritual life. Just as flesh is the enemy of all spiritual life, it is the locus of enmity to a life of stewardship"* (Gill, *Stewardship*, p. 96).

This is why I emphasized last week that these stewardship transformations are impossible without God. The good news is the Holy Spirit can give us victory in this stewardship transformation.

It's pretty obvious, we live in a very discontent society. Our culture is diseased with discontent. We tend to grow dissatisfied want something new...something better...something more.

The cell phone industry feeds on this proneness and, in fact, plays to it and feeds it. It seems they make phones to last about a year and a half. Often the software updates outpace the hardware and when you update your phone it actually runs slower, with more glitches. So, for six months while you wait for your Two-year contract to end, you are desperate for a new phone, and you go to the store and they show you the newest phone with more gadgets and better features and we're like, "My Precious!"

All advertising is geared toward this discontent proneness. It's geared to generate discontentment. The goal is to make you discontent so that you think you need something you don't have. The goal of television programming is to make you buy things as well. Program breaks are designed so you can see the commercials. And if the program isn't popular enough to get more and more people to watch and then to see

the commercial, then the program is off the air because the whole idea is to appeal to your discontent, create a need you didn't know you had, and drive you by that need to buy something. The program is incidental. The commercial is king.

But, God is working something very different in you. God is working to reclaim you and your stewardship; transforming you from craving what is not possessed...to contentment with what he provides.

Now, let's be clear, Biblical contentment is not simply a "care-less" attitude. Biblical contentment is not suggesting you don't value what you have and take care of what you have and keep your possessions in good condition and well maintained. In other words, Biblical contentment doesn't go around cynically saying, "Whatever."

Biblical contentment is not a stoic disdain for anything material. The Biblical word, "*content*" goes way back to the Greek term which meant to be self-sufficient, to be satisfied, and to have enough. The term actually indicates a certain independence, a certain lack of necessity for aid or help.

The Bible then not only identifies contentment as a virtue but speaks of contentment as a command. You are to be content with whatever you have. You are to be content with food and clothing. You are to be content with your wages. You are to be content because you understand that an utterly, totally, infinitely, and supernaturally resourceful God will never leave you or forsake you. **Contentment is a virtue; contentment is a command.**

This transformation is again counterculture. The Bible calls Christians to a transformation from this unrest...this relentless attraction or impulse for what is not possessed to contentment with what God provides.

The Bible calls us to contentment

In Paul's letter to the young church leader Timothy, he actually commands this contentment transformation. Apparently some misguided first

century philosophers and religious teachers saw early Christianity and the spread of the gospel as an entrepreneurial opportunity which could lead to financial gain (1 Tim. 6:3-5).

So, Paul coaches Timothy on how to deal with them by saying, *"... 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. ⁹ Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction."* - 1 Tim. 6:6-9

The wisdom of Proverbs calls for this transformation to contentment when it says, *"Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. ⁹ Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God."* - Prov. 30:8-9

So, what's the secret to allowing this transformation to take place in our lives? What is the secret to contentment? The Apostle Paul experienced this transformation to contentment with what God provides. I want to show you what Paul says about this transformation in his life. Turn in your Bibles to Philippians 4:10-20. Paul is thanking the believers in Philippi for their regular financial support of his ministry and in the process he shares about his personal stewardship transformation to contentment. Read verses 10-20

The secret to learning contentment

Paul says he has *"learned the secret of being content in any and every situation."* In his comments here, he reveals some hints as to how he learned it. I want to look at three hints for how you and I can learn contentment in our own lives.

Hint #1 - Develop confidence in God's providence

At the heart of transformation to contentment is trust. The Psalms tell us that, *"The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it (Psalm 24:1)*. And Deuteronomy reminds us that God is the one who gives us everything we have, all the money we have, all the possessions we have and all the skill and ability and know how to produce all that we produce in our lives (Deut. 8:10-18). Contentment begins to take root in our lives when we center our confidence in God as the owner and provider of all that we have.

This is why Jesus can say in Matthew 6, *"...do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well"* (28-34).

It's clear that the Apostle Paul had a patient confidence in God's sovereign providence. This is hinted at in verse 10, but Paul reveals his certainty of it in verse 19. I think it's foundational to Paul's contentment. He knew it was all in God's hands and in God's perfect time God would provide.

There was no panic in his heart; there was no need to manipulate people. There was no turning of the screws, as it were, to get what he thought he wanted or needed. Paul was fully confident that God was in charge. And as long as God was in charge and God was ordering everything for His own purposes, everything was going to be fine. So he was content.

Folks, this is where contentment starts! You will never know a contented heart until you believe that a sovereign God is ordering everything for your good and His glory. And once you come to that conclusion and it finds its way into how you live, and how your process life, you will experience contentment...not until.

As long as you feel that things are out of control and you've got to get a hold of them and you have to make them happen, you've got a problem

because you'll frustrate yourself in the process. Work as hard as you can and be content that God is in control of the results. That's contentment. Paul had that.

Paul experienced contentment first, because of his confidence in the providence of God. Second, he developed a satisfaction with the basics of life through dependence on the Holy Spirit.

Hint #2 - Develop a satisfaction with the basics of life

Look at verses 11-12 again. What is this telling us? Basically, Paul was able to be satisfied with little. He had bare subsistence. His need was deep and great, but he didn't acknowledge any discontent. He was so at peace with the providence of a sovereign God that he was content.

He was so satisfied with very little that it didn't matter that he was a prisoner in the sense that it took his contentment, it didn't. It didn't matter that he was chained to a Roman soldier, that he ate with bare subsistence, that he stayed in a place that was greatly lacking in comfort. That didn't really touch his contentment, he was satisfied with little.

We live in a culture that is never content period; with little or much. And my experience is that the more people have...the more discontent they are. I mean, typically, if you want to meet a miserable unhappy wretched person, find a rich man somewhere. The attitude of people today is their needs can never be met. The attitude of people today is anything but satisfaction with little.

To become faithful stewards, you are going to have to allow the Holy Spirit to develop in you a true satisfaction with the basics of life. You are going to have to ask the Holy Spirit to teach you how to say, "I'm doing well regardless if I have little, or if I have much, I have all I need because God loves me and has committed to providing all I need."

This week on your own take out a sheet of paper and divide it into two columns. Make a list on one side of what you really need. I mean what you really need. On the other side list all the "gravy" God has provided

for you. Then or in your small groups talk about what lessons you learned. How does this list impact you in terms of things you've been wanting? How does it impact your sense of overall wellbeing?

Contentment is probably best learned by practicing it. Just for fun, practice doing without. Choose one area of your life right now or one want you've had in your mind and imagine life without that. And choose just to say, "No" for the sake of saying no and strengthening your "no" muscle. What's one thing that you really love that you could say "no" to right now?

What I've proposed so far is; you will never know real contentment in your heart until you have a confident trust in the providence of God who is ordering every circumstance of life for His glory; you don't need to manipulate, and you don't need to lose your mind in trying to control everything.

And, second, you'll never know contentment until you can be satisfied with little because your satisfaction is not dependent on "wants" that are pushed on you as "needs."

Let me give you a third hint to Paul's transformation to contentment: Develop independence from circumstances.

Hint #3 - Develop independence from circumstances.

Paul says a couple different times, a couple different ways in this passage that he has learned to be content in whatever the circumstances...well fed or hungry, in plenty or in want. That's the key idea. In whatever the circumstance, I'm the same." It's the part of contentment that is indifferent and independent of all circumstances.

Folks, for most of us, the one thing that steals our contentment most frequently is bad circumstances. Right? We crumble and we lose our contentment in the sense of sufficiency, satisfaction and peace because we are victimized by circumstances.

Paul knew what it was to be in difficult circumstances but he lived above them. And that is essential to contentment. How can you live above them? I think Paul did it by keeping a heavenly perspective in view, rather than focusing exclusively on circumstances earth. In other words, contentment will grow in you as you maintain a heavenly vision, as you keep an eternal perspective.

Paul reveals this perspective clearly in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 when he writes, *"Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."*

In other words, Paul lived in the light of the glory to come, not in the light of the pain here. Here was a contented man. He had been transformed from craving what he didn't possess to contentment with what God provided. His secret:

1. Confidence in God's provision
2. Satisfaction with the basics of life
3. Independence from circumstances because his affections were on another kingdom.

Each of us is called to allow this transformation to occur in our lives. The Holy Spirit is seeking to develop it in us. But we must cooperate by practicing it and "putting off" the old, discontented spirit, and "putting on" the clothes of contentment!

We must allow it to take root and grow in us. And as we do, we are transformed into faithful stewards who refuse to use their resources to chase after what is not possessed but instead live contented lives.

Friends...this transformation will free you! It frees you from the treadmill of wanting more and more and more. It frees you from the pressure of the financial debt which often accompanies that treadmill. And it frees you to use your resources for the eternal investment of God's work.

And according to Paul in 1 Timothy 6, this transformation from craving to contentment frees you to be *"rich in good deeds"*, to be *"generous and willing to share."* *"In this way, you will lay up treasure for yourselves as a firm foundation for the coming age..."*

Response...

What's one thing you can give up this week (for the whole week), just to prove to yourself you can do it and to strengthen your "no" muscle, and to learn that God is enough to sustain you?

What is God bringing to your mind?

[FPU Promo] - If last week and this week's messages have stirred something in you and highlighted stewardship as area of your life that could use some reclamation, then I want to encourage you to lean into this.

We have a very important course coming up in March that I believe everyone could benefit from. It's called Financial Peace University. This course is so valuable we offer it a couple times a year. How many of you have already taken this course?

If you want to:

- understand how to be free from financial stress
- if you want to maximize what God has allowed you to have
- If you want to be worry free and more generous...then you need to register for this class.