

"It Is Well With My Soul"

Contentment

How to Enjoy a Satisfied Life

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

"Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

(Philippians 4:11-13)

Contents

Page 3 - Assignment

Page 4 - Questions

Page 5 - The Scripture Frame

Page 6 - Day 1: Rivers of Peace and Billows of Sorrows

Page 7 - Day 2: The School of Contentment

Page 8 - Day 3: The Classroom of Instruction - Explanation

Page 9 - Day 4: The Classroom of Instruction - Application

Page 10 - Day 5: The Playground of Experience - "Hard Knocks"

Page 11 - Supplement: John Gill on Contentment

Monday:

- (1) Read "Day 1: Rivers of Peace and Billows of Sorrows"
- (2) Answer Questions for "Day 1"
- (3) Memorize Phil. 4:11-13
- (4) Memorize Stanza of "It Is Well With My Soul."

Tuesday:

- (1) Read "Day 2: The School of Contentment"
- (2) Answer Questions for "Day 2"
- (3) Memorize Phil. 4:11-13
- (4) Memorize Stanza of "It Is Well With My Soul."

Wednesday:

- (1) Read "Day 3: The Classroom of Instruction - Explanation"
- (2) Answer Questions for "Day 3"
- (3) Memorize Phil. 4:11-13
- (4) Memorize Stanza of "It Is Well With My Soul."

Thursday:

- (1) Read "Day 4: The Classroom of Instruction - Application"
- (2) Answer Questions for "Day 4"
- (3) Memorize Phil. 4:11-13
- (4) Memorize Stanza of "It Is Well With My Soul."

Friday:

- (1) Read "Day 5: The Playground of Experience - 'Hard Knocks'"
- (2) Answer Questions for "Day 5"
- (3) Memorize Phil. 4:11-13
- (4) Memorize Stanza of "It Is Well With My Soul."

Saturday:

- (1) Read "Supplement: John Gill on Contentment"
 - (2) Answer Questions for "Bonus: Supplement"
 - (3) Memorize Phil. 4:11-13
 - (4) Memorize Stanza of "It Is Well With My Soul."
 - (5) Write a Testimony: Choose one of the truths learned from the lesson and explain how you personally experienced that truth in your life during the week.
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1. Day 1: Rivers of Peace and Billows of Sorrow

- (1) What do "rivers" and "billows" represent?
- (2) How does the "sovereign government" of God relate to "whatever my lot"?
- (3) Why does God sometimes allow the Christian to suffer?

2. Day 2: The School of Contentment

- (1) What are the two levels of learning in the "School of Contentment"?
- (2) From which authority did Paul "learn" to be content?
- (3) What is the difference between "explaining" a truth and "applying" a truth?

3. Day 3: The Classroom of Instruction - Explanation

- (1) Name some of the things in your life that sometimes become substitutes for the Word of God.
- (2) Why is the Word of God the only dependable textbook able to teach truth?
- (3) What does "contentment" mean?

4. Day 4: The Classroom of Instruction - Application

- (1) Describe the difference between the way a Christian and a non-christian views life.
- (2) Describe the difference between God "using the believer" and God "working through the believer".
- (3) How does the believer's satisfaction in Christ relate to his strength from Christ?

5. Day 5: The Playground of Experience - "Hard Knocks"

- (1) What does Paul mean when he uses the word "instructed" in verse 12?
- (2) What is the difference between "knowledge", "understanding" and "wisdom"?
- (3) What message should Christians be trying to share with their friends and family?

6. Bonus: Supplement

- (1) According to points 1 and 2, how does "envy" and "covetousness" unsettle the soul?
 - (2) According to point 4, name three things that you "fret" about on a daily basis.
 - (3) According to point 5, why should the Christian never "complain"?
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The Scripture Frame

Philippians 4:11-13

(These notes are to be used in conjunction with the daily studies)

(11a) The School of Contentment: Complaining Forsaken

11 Not that I speak in respect of want:

(11b) The Classroom of Instruction: Explanation - satisfaction in every condition (through Christ)

for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

(12a) The Playground of Experience: Extreme Conditions - abasement and abundance

12 I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound:

(12b) The Playground of Experience: Discipline of Hard Knocks - in every place and all circumstances

every where and in all things I am instructed

(12b) The Playground of Experience: Extreme Conditions - fulness and hunger

both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

(13) The Classroom of Instruction: Application - strength for every circumstance (through Christ)

13 I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

Day 1: Rivers of Peace and Billows of Sorrow

*When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

Introduction: Rivers and billows, mountains and valleys, sunshine and rain: these are the extremities of life through which all creation must pass and live. Every person has his "highs" as well as his "lows". There are good times and there are bad times. God has arranged it to be this way, for "to every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: a time" for every circumstance according to the plan of God. (Ecc. 3:1-15) Consider:

I. The Extremities of Circumstances. "When peace like a river, attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea billows roll." Rivers and billows are the analogies chosen to describe the extreme experiences of peace and sorrow. Rivers are deep channels carved out in the earth through which water flows from the summit of a mountain through the outlets of the valleys. They are characteristically peaceful, bringing much refreshment to "a dry and thirsty land". On the other hand, billows are large waves of water accumulated on the surface of an ocean by the unfettered wind gathering in a tempest. They are characteristically fearful, bringing great distress to sailors whose ships have little stability on the stormy seas. Rivers resemble those occasions when peace and joy refresh the soul; billows resemble those experiences when despair and sorrow unsettle the soul. One is thought of as a blessing, the other as a burden. Sometimes, "peace, like a river, attendeth my way," and other times, "sorrows like sea billows roll."

II. The Oversight of God. "Whatever my lot..." Whether it be the rivers of peace or the billows of sorrow, all things are governed by the LORD who "sitteth upon the flood; yea, the LORD [that] sitteth king forever." (Ps. 29:10) (1) His Sovereign Government. His dominion is an everlasting dominion and "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." (Dan. 4:35) For this reason, we may say, "'whatever my lot...' is according to His sovereign will. (2) His Sovereign Grace. He has promised, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Cor. 12:9) God will often distribute the "lot" of pain and suffering so that we may say, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." (2 Cor. 12:9)

III. The Instruction of Scripture. "Thou hast taught me to say." The Lord not only reigns as the supreme Governor whose sovereign grace overshadows every turn in the winding path His people travel, but He also embraces His people as a loving Father, tenderly teaching His children the lessons of life. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame." (Ps. 103:13) Every step we take is outlined in the Word of God wherein He teaches us how to react and what to say in response to all experiences. Those delicate words every aching heart longs to repeat, that calming expression every bruised soul seeks to embrace, that comforting assurance every distressed mind searches to secure, is to be found in the mouths of those who have been taught by Christ, "It is well, it is well, with my soul."

Day 2: The School of Contentment

"Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." - Phil. 4:11-13

Introduction: The Apostle Paul had been captured by soldiers and imprisoned in a Roman dungeon. Many years previous, he had been instrumental starting a church in Philippi where he was greatly loved by the brethren. Upon hearing of his imprisonment, the church sent Epaphroditus to Rome in order to deliver their financial contribution to aid in his oppression. The visit was received with much joy. Paul responded by writing a letter of thanksgiving to the church. However, lest the church misunderstand the purpose of his letter, he assures them that he was in no way making a complaint about his poor and hazardous condition. Rather, he takes the opportunity to press upon them his satisfaction in Christ no matter what his circumstance might dictate. He makes four references to "learning" how to be satisfied in Christ, which naturally leads us to the conclusion that every child of God must enter the School of Contentment if he is to be satisfied in life no matter his experiences.

I. The School of Contentment. Paul said, "Not that I speak in respect of want...". In other words, Paul is saying to the church, "Please do not misunderstand my expression of gratitude for your kind contribution - I have not described my difficult circumstances and poor condition because I am complaining about the things that have happened to me." His reason for not complaining about his problems are summarized under the analogy of a school. He says, "For I have learned", "I am instructed" and "I know how". There are two levels of learning in school: first, the theory explained by textbooks in a classroom; second, the experience practiced by inter-relationships on a playground.

II. The Classroom of Instruction. From where does Paul receive his knowledge when he says he has "learned"? From the same resource he ascribes for Timothy's knowledge: "Continue thou in the thing which thou hast learned and been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." (2 Tim. 3:14,15) There are two parts to such knowledge. (1) Explanation. This is where knowledge is gained through a written lesson - an instruction manual. "I have learned (from the truth of Scripture) in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." (Prov. 19:23) (2) Application. This is where knowledge is gained through personal connection - making the lesson meaningful for one's self. "I can do all things (based on the truth of Scripture) through Christ which strengtheneth me." Yes, satisfaction in every condition and strength for every circumstance is a lesson to be learned from the textbook of Holy Scripture.

III. The Playground of Experience. Now the lesson of contentment has been learned by the explanation of Scripture and its application to life, it must be practiced in the "hard knocks" of everyday experience. So Paul says, "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." In every extremity, we may be confident of Christ's sufficiency!

Day 3: The Classroom of Instruction - Explanation

"For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content"—Phil. 4:11

Introduction: It is a common practice today for Christians to seek an increase of their knowledge from all other resources aside from God's Word. Whether it be music, authority figures, the media, self-help "christian" literature, peer pressure or even personal experience, men and women are embracing all sources of information at the expense of Biblical truth. Of course, such things are seldom considered distractions or substitutions for the Word of God. Nevertheless, they have become like a cancer which has eaten away at some of the most dedicated Christians. Let us reevaluate the source from which we increase our knowledge.

I. The Textbook. It was pointed out in yesterday's study that Paul had "learned" his lesson on contentment from the same textbook as young Timothy. For he gave this counsel to his son in the faith, "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast know the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Tim. 3:15-17) Consider, (1) Timothy had learned the truth from God's Word as a child; (2) Timothy had been assured of the truth by God who had instructed him; (3) Timothy had been made wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus as a result of his knowledge of Holy Scripture; (4) the authority of Scripture is sealed by God Who has breathed out (inspired) His Word; (5) the profit of Scripture is fourfold: doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness; (6) the purpose of Scripture is for the man of God to be throughly furnished unto all good works. Thus, Paul had "learned" the lesson on contentment from the textbook of Scripture which is the only sufficient rule for all saving knowledge, practice and faith. It is the only dependable textbook able to teach us too.

II. The Lesson. What does Paul say he learned from the Scripture? "In whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." Such truth is contained in these passages: Job 13:15; Psalm 37:18,19; 73:25. If, however, we seek for a definition on the word "content", we would say that contentment is the quality of rest cultivated by satisfaction in Christ. (1) The Quality of Rest: Paul told Timothy, "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." (2 Tim. 1:7) The Christian has been delivered from an unsettled spirit by being anchored securely in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why he is able to remain unmoved during the worst circumstances - his assurance in an unchanging God gives him stability in an ever changing world. (2) Cultivated: Paul gave this counsel to the Christians in Colosee - "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth...your life is hid with Christ in God." (Col. 3:1-4) As a result of our security in Christ, the Christian is to nurture his new life in Christ by making spiritual investments instead of merely increasing his earthly riches; (3) Satisfaction in Christ: Paul testified, "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ". (Phil. 3:8) The loss of his wealth, his friends and his freedom could not unsettle his soul, for what loss he suffered on the earth was softened by the eternal riches he possessed in Christ. Such is our hope and joy too!

Day 4: The Classroom of Instruction - Application

"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."—Phil. 4:13

Introduction: We learned yesterday that contentment is the quality of rest cultivated by satisfaction in Christ. Invariably linked with contentment is empowerment. For when Paul applied his satisfaction in Christ to the various circumstances of life, he came to the conclusion that he could "do all things through Christ which strengths him." The believer who enjoys a peaceful heart of contentment receives the added benefit of a powerful capacity to persevere. A Christian is able to "continue stedfastly" in the Lord based on three governing principles.

I. Possibility in Opportunity. Paul said, "I can do all things". All things include the blessings and the burdens. Paul says he "can do" it all - he has the capacity to sing and cry, to gain and loose, to be prosperous and poor, to enjoy friendship and opposition. Such a capacity to confidently live through the good and bad times is a quality not possessed by everyone. However, it is a gift available to every believer in Christ. If a Christian's satisfaction is in Christ, then he has a different perspective on life. He no longer views the world as the object of pleasure, but rather embraces the Lord as the fulness of gratification. As far as he is concerned, the world exists to bring him closer to God, not draw him further from the Lord. He makes a distinction between the blessings and the Blesser. Because the Blesser is the object of his desire, "all things" (blessings/burdens) become a means to enjoy the Blesser. "All things" are therefore seen as opportunities to enjoy God and the possibilities of such a life are immeasurable.

II. Animation, not Utilization. Paul specifies that his capacity "to do all things" is contingent "through Christ". The Greek preposition "en" and translated into English as "through" means "being or remaining within, with the primary idea of rest and continuance". Paul therefore tells us the reason why he is able "to do all things" is because he is animated (living within Christ). Jesus expressed this idea by using the analogy of a vine and the branches: "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing." John 15:1-5) The relationship between Christ the believer is reciprocal - Christ and the believer live in each other. This union is essential to all activity, for "without [Christ] ye can do nothing." Utilization, on the other hand, means "to make practical use of" something. Christians often think of themselves as "tools to be used" rather than a "glove to be filled". The difference, of course, is that a tool receives power from a hand on the outside and its shape remains conformed to its own design; a glove receives power from a hand on the inside and its shape is conformed to the image of the object filling it. Instead of "using" Christ or being "used" by Christ, Paul is working through Christ to accomplish "all things".

III. Power from Pleasure. Finally, Paul says he can do all things through Christ "which strengeth me." We can do all things through Christ which strengthens us, because we live with all things through Christ who satisfies us. Unless we are fully satisfied in Him, we cannot know the fulness of His strength. Christians want the benefit of spiritual power, without considering the necessity of spiritual pleasure. As there is pleasure in eating food which brings nourishment for physical strength, so there is pleasure in "eating" of Christ which brings nourishment for spiritual strength. Satisfaction is to strength, what the root is to the fruit. When Christ is "all in all" (satisfaction), then we can do "all things" through Him (strength).

Day 5: The Playground of Experience - "Hard Knocks"

"I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."—Phil. 4:12

Introduction: Paul's "learning" in whatsoever state he was, therewith to be content, is a different kind of education than his "instruction" to be full and hungry, abased and abounding.

I. The Discipline of Hard Knocks. Paul says, "I am instructed". The Greek word is "memuhmai" which refers to the "ancient mysteries" taught to students through an initiation process. Paul uses the word to describe the "mysteries of providence" learned through the initiation process of poverty and prosperity. In modern terms, Paul is talking about the discipline of "Hard Knocks". George Ade, an American columnist, coined this phrase in 1912. It was popularized by the song, "It's the Hard Knocks Life", in the 1977 musical adaptation of Annie - the story about poor and oppressed orphans struggling to make it through the hardships of adversity. As there are essential lessons that must be learned in the classroom through the textbook of Scripture, so there are also invaluable lessons that can only be gathered on the playground through personal experience. We may helpfully divide the learning process as follows: the classroom is where information is accumulated (knowledge); the homeworkroom is where knowledge is assimilated (understanding); the playground is where understanding is skillfully applied (wisdom). It is important to observe, "hard knocks" are experienced "every where and in all things". Attempting to move country or change circumstances only ushers in a new set of "hard knocks". Although "hard knocks" are inescapable, they are nevertheless indispensable.

II. The Balance of Extreme Conditions. Paul says, "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound...both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." He uses three expressions to describe the same idea - if the experiences of life are measurable on a number scale, then there must be negative as well as positive numbers in order for the calculation to be balanced. "Abasement", "hunger" and "suffering need" describe the humiliating condition of living under the baseline of poverty and being a reproach to the wealthy; "abounding", "fullness" and "abundance" describe the exalted condition of living above the baseline of prosperity and being the envy of the poor. Paul had lived in both circumstances and it was his conclusion the one was as necessary as the other. We must remember, sunshine and rain are extreme conditions, yet both are required for maintaining the balance of life on earth. This is why Paul could confidently testify to the pastors in Ephesus that although he was not sure the exact nature of the persecution that was quickly approaching, nevertheless, he says, "none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify of the gospel of the grace of God." (Acts 20:24) Whatever the affliction, he was unmoved by the prospect of suffering because his journey in life was founded on the joy he had in Christ and he was determined to finish his journey with joy. Furthermore, Christ had given him a job to fulfill through the course of his journey, "the ministry", for which he availed himself of every opportunity "to testify of the gospel of the grace of God." May we learn by the example of Paul, that sometimes our suffering may open up occasions to share with others the reason for our peace and satisfaction in life - "the gospel of the grace of God."

Supplement: John Gill on Contentment

Contentment is an entire acquiescence of a man's mind in his lot and portion, in his state and condition in the present life, be it what it may, prosperous or adverse. Consider:

1. Contentment and envy are contrary to one another; "envying and strife" go together, and where there is strife and contention there is no contentment, but "confusion and every evil work;" a man that envies the superior or equal happiness of another, neither of which he can bear, inwardly pines and frets at it. Envy and fretting meet in the same persons, and are equally deformed from; and are evils to be found in good men, when they observe the prosperity of the wicked, and dwell upon their own afflictions (Ps. 37:1,7; 73:3), and are contrary to that "charity" which "envieth not;" to rest and acquiescence in the will of God, which becometh saints; and where the sin of envy is predominant, a man can have no true contentment of mind; "envy is rottenness of the bones," it gnaws upon a man, torments him, eats out his very vitals; "Wrath killeth the foolish man, and envy slayeth the silly one" (Prov. 14:30; Job 5:2).

2. Contentment is opposite to avarice, and avarice to that; and therefore the one must be quitted in order to possess the other. "Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have" (Heb. 13:5), a covetous man cannot be a truly contented man; he cannot be content with what he has, he always wants more. The Greek word for "covetousness" is pleonexia, "a having" or a desire to "have more;" not but that there may be a lawful desire of having more in some cases and for some good ends and purposes, and in submission to the will of God; but it is an anxious, immoderate, and unbounded desire of more which is criminal; and especially to have it in an unlawful way, and when a person has much already; it is often usual with men to fix upon the pitch of wealth and riches they are desirous of attaining to, and think if they could attain to that they should be content; now such persons, until they arrive at such a pitch, must be all the while in a state of discontent; and should they arrive to it they are not sure of content; nay they seldom have it, but then enlarge their desires and extend their limits; in short they never have enough, but are like the horseleech, crying, "Give, give," more and more; and in other things persons of this complexion are like that creature, of which naturalists observe it has no passage through, it takes in all it can but lets out nothing; as a covetous man grasps at all he can, but will part with nothing; and like the said creature, which breaks and bursts with its own fulness.

3. Contentment is opposite to pride and ambition. A proud ambitious man cannot bear that any should be above him, or upon a footing with him; and when he observes this, it gives him uneasiness, and fills him with disquietude and discontent; yea let his pride and ambition be ever so much gratified, he is not content, he still wants more; for the proud man "enlarges his desires as hell," or the grave, and like that "cannot be satisfied," which, how full soever, never says, "It is enough" (Hab. 2:5; Prov. 30:16), for though the world is set in their hearts, and they have all that is in it, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," they are not content; as it is reported of Alexander, when he had conquered the whole world as he thought, sat down and cried because there was not another world to conquer; so boundless were his pride and ambition, and so little contentment had he in his acquisitions.

4. Anxiety of mind, or a distressing care about worldly things; as about food, drink, and

raiment, is contrary to true contentment of mind; and therefore our Lord dissuades from it by a variety of arguments; which may be read in (Matthew 6:25-34). "Take no thought for your life," &c. to do this is to act below the creatures; they might learn better things from them: besides, such anxious care is needless, and of no avail, nothing is to be got by it; God will take care of his people; the grand point is, to seek the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and leave all other things with him; which is the best way to have contentment and happiness.

5. Murmurings and repinings under adverse dispensations of providence, are the reverse of contentment of mind; such as are frequently to be observed in the Israelites in the wilderness, who were a discontented people, often murmuring against Moses and Aaron, and repining at afflictive providences; and from which Christians are dehorted by their example; "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured;" and murmurers and complainers are joined together, and both must be reckoned among discontented persons; for which murmurs and complaints there is no reason, not even under afflictive providences: not with the people of God; for their afflictions are fatherly chastisements; nor with wicked men, though they are punishments; for "wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" since it is less than he deserves (Lam. 3:39).