



Text: Php 4:10-13<sup>1</sup> (with 1 Tim 6:6-8)  
Series: Living the Gospel (1 Timothy)  
Title: Living the Gospel with Contentment  
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There are two words that we find in Paul's First Letter to Timothy that deserve our special attention. They are two words, I believe, that confuse us and challenge us. They are particularly challenging words for North American Christians; they are words that go to the heart of what it means to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ and we need to think about them together.

Paul wrote to Timothy...

**“Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.” 1 Timothy 6:6-8**

Any guesses as to which two words I have in mind? Well, the two words that I believe we need to think about together are the words “gain” and “contentment.” What does Paul mean by “great gain”? What does Paul mean by “contentment”? In a culture like ours that is saturated with material goods, we struggle with these words. Studies demonstrate that as our stuff increases, our contentment sinks. But we keep on confusing “gaining stuff” with “contentment.”

What Paul says to Timothy here about “contentment” and “gain” is dealt with more fully in his Letter to the Philippians so this morning we're going to shift our focus from Paul's letter to Timothy to his letter to the Philippians. He wrote to his friend in the church in the city of Philippi...

**“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.” Philippians 4:10-13**

Warren Wiersbe tells the story of a pastor who was discussing with one of his deacons the leadership potential of a man in the congregation who we'll call

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission, All rights reserved.



“Jim.” The deacon evaluated Jim’s potential with this very interesting analogy. The deacon said...

**“The trouble with him is that he’s a thermometer and not a thermostat!”**

The pastor asked him to explain. The deacons said, “Well, pastor it’s like this. “A thermometer doesn’t change anything around it – it just registers the temperature. It’s always going up and down. But a thermostat regulates the surroundings and changes them when they need to be changed. Jim is a thermometer – he lacks the power to change things. Instead, they change him.”<sup>2</sup>

With that analogy in mind, how would you evaluate the Apostle Paul: Was he a thermometer or a thermostat? Well, I don’t think there’s really much debate: Paul was a thermostat.

**“if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.” 1 Timothy 6:8**

**“...I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content... In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.” Philippians 4:12**

- Not controlled by the situation – circumstances didn’t dictate his mental and emotional state.

Would you like to learn this secret? I certainly would! This morning I want to share with you some of the insights that Paul learned about contentment and some stories from the lives of other believers like you and me who are learning this tremendously important lesson.

There is nothing mysterious about this secret. But it involves decisions we need to make that take the shape of...

- **An attitude of our mind**
- **A decision of our will**
- **And an exercise of our faith**

For those who are believers in Jesus Christ, all these things are within us – they are within our control. This secret does not depend on anything that lies outside our grasp. The ability to be content lies within our grasp.

The word “content” in the Greek language in which Paul wrote this letter literally means “self-sufficient.” In other words, the resources we need for contentment are all right inside us.

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<sup>2</sup>Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). *The Bible exposition commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. (Php 4:10). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.



Notice Paul's inventory of his internal resources:

**“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” Philippians 4:13**

Jesus, living inside him, is Paul's source of sufficiency and contentment.

I want you to notice that Christian “self-sufficiency” is not the same things as humanistic self-sufficiency. Humanistic self-sufficiency says: “You have all you need in you. You are the master of all things. You are the centre of the universe. You are complete in yourself.” Christian self-sufficiency is found in a relationship with Christ. Paul wrote in one of this letters...

**“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Galatians 2:20**

The resource we need to live is inside us because Jesus is living in us. The key to contentment is turning our lives over to him and allowing him to live through us in every situation.

**Question: What, or Who, is within? Is it Jesus? Or are you on your own?**

Paul outlines **three key lessons** for us to learn if we're to learn contentment in all situations; to become thermostats instead of thermometers.

The **first** lesson we need to learn is that...

**Contentment is the result of learning from the process of God in our lives**

This is where the **“attitude of our minds”** needs to be changed.

Paul said...

**“I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.” Philippians 4:11**

1. **“learned”** points us to a process of education

We need to recognize that we're in God's school of life-long learning; often called, **“The School of Hard Knocks.”**

The writer of the Book of Hebrews tells us the “encouraging” word that in this school “the Lord disciplines the one he loves.” He “disciplines,” or “trains” us. The picture the writer evokes is the world of Greek education, a world that often involved strenuous exercise and rigorous demands. He tells us...



**“For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” Hebrews 12:11**

Paul’s educational experience often involved pain and hardship. Several times in his letters he retells the story of the circumstances of his ministry – they are often painful. One very personal training session is recorded in 2 Corinthians chapter 12.

Paul tells us that “a thorn in the flesh” was given to him by God to keep him humble – it “harassed” (lit. to beat on) him to keep him from becoming puffed up with spiritual pride. Three times he asked the Lord to take it away but God said to him...

**“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” 2 Corinthians 12:9**

The “thorn” wasn’t removed but Paul learned in God’s school that God’s grace was his sufficiency...

**“For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” 2 Corinthians 12:10**

2. “**have** learned” points us to a process with progress

**When anyone says “I have learned that...” you can bet there’s a tough story behind it.** You might want to listen when someone says, “I have learned....” Martin Luther, the Protestant Reformer of the 16<sup>th</sup> century was a man who endured serious opposition and intimidation in his preaching of the Gospel. He wrote...

**“Next to faith, this is the highest art: to be content in the calling in which God has placed you. I have not learned it yet.”** (© 2007 PreachingToday.com Martin Luther, “Martin Luther--The Early Years,” Christian History, no. 34.)

Pastor Tim Brown tells the story of a young man who said those loaded words, “I have learned something,” to him one day. Brown wrote...

*I've been around college students a long time, and you can't help but have your favorites. One of my favorites was a kid named Tim Vanderveen from Spring Lake, Michigan. Tall, broad shouldered, with curly hair and a smile as broad as the dawn, he was as handsome as they came. He was a great student. He graduated from Hope College in the early '90s and took a job at Prince Corporation, now Johnson Controls. He scurried up the ladder of success about*



*as quickly as anyone can. That is, until a rawboned, wind-whipped November afternoon.*

*I was sitting in my office, and my secretary told me Tim Vanderveen was on the line. He's a friend, so I was eager to talk to him. I said, "Hey, Tim, how you doing?"*

*A weak, trembling voice said, "I'm not doing so good."*

*I said, "What's up with you?"*

*He said, "I'm in the hospital in Grand Rapids. I got the flu or something. My folks are out of the country."*

*I said, "I'm going to be in Grand Rapids later today. Maybe I can stop by and see you. Would that be okay?"*

*He said, "I'd like that a lot."*

*By the time I got to Tim, the doctors had already gotten to him. It wasn't the flu. It was leukemia. And that began a three-year, arduous battle that he would lose—or win, maybe.*

*Now come with me to Room 5255, Butterworth Hospital. They call it Spectrum Health now. I walked into the room. His mother was sitting in the corner crying. You can't blame her. Tim was lying on his side. They had positioned the pillows between his skinny little legs. His hair wasn't curly anymore. There wasn't enough energy for him to look at me, so I got down on one knee so I could look at him eyeball to eyeball. I said, "Hi, Tim." He said, "Hi, Tim." There was this long, awkward pause. I'd been a pastor for 20 years, and I still didn't know what to say. He broke the silence.*

*He said, "I've learned something."*

*Now I know this much at least: you don't trifle with the words of a person who is about to die; you just listen carefully. So I said, "Tell me, partner, what have you learned?"*

*He said, "I have learned that life is not like a VCR."*

*Now, I didn't get it then any more than you're getting it now. So I said, "I don't get it. What do you mean?"*

*He said, "It's not like a VCR; you can't fast forward the bad parts." Long pause. I'm thinking to myself, Where does he get this stuff? Then he interrupts the*



*silence again to say, "But I have learned that Jesus Christ is in every frame, and right now that's just enough."*

*It was just enough when his parents rocked that little baby at the waters of baptism that Jesus Christ should be in the frame. It was just enough when he toddled off to first grade that Jesus Christ should be in the frame. It was just enough when he turned his tassel toward an uncertain future at Hope College that Jesus Christ should be in that frame. And it was just enough when he breathed his last here and his first there that Jesus Christ should be in the frame.*

(© 2007 PreachingToday.com Tim Brown, "I Can Do All Things Through Christ" Preaching Today audio, No. 23)

**The second** lesson we need to learn if we want to be “thermostats” instead of “thermometers” is that...

**Contentment is the result of submitting to the providence of God in our lives**

This calls for a **“decision of our will.”**

**“Providence”** is God’s work in arranging situations and circumstances to fulfill His purposes.

Paul said...

**“In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.” Philippians 4:12**

1. “I have learned the secret” = lit. “have been initiated” (cf secret rules and practices of secret societies)

The New English Bible translates is this way...

**“I have been thoroughly initiated into the human lot with all its ups and downs.”**

God has ordered our lives for a purpose – there are no accidents with God. God is guiding us through our initiation into the realities of life

I love the wisdom Donna Patton received from her young niece. Her brother and sister-in-law were expecting a baby and she asked her *“four-year-old niece, Justina, “What do you want, a baby brother or a baby sister?”*

*“Aunt Donna,” she chided, “sometimes you just gots to take what God gives ya.”*

(© 2007 PreachingToday.com Donna Patton, Hillsboro, OH. Christian Reader, "Lite Fare.")



There is a truck load of wisdom in the words of that four-year old. In order to learn the secret of contentment we need to learn to submit ourselves to the plans and purposes of God.

And the tough part of that assignment is that we need to do it...

2. "In any and every circumstance..."

Notice the parallels that Paul sketches out for us. He bookends all of life with his words: "plenty" and "abundance" on the one hand versus "hunger" and "need" on the other.

If we are "thermometers," our lives will be swinging back and forth between these extremes – up and down, up and down with our changing circumstances. Paul has learned secret of living a contented, steady life regardless of the temperature of the circumstances.

When you consider the ups and downs of Paul's circumstances, his contentedness was truly remarkable. This is his testimony about his life experience...

**"Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the 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 I was 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, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches." 2 Corinthians 11:24-28**

But Paul didn't allow the circumstances to dictate his temperature. He said...

**"If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness." 2 Corinthians 11:30**

Why? Because Paul recognized God's providence in his circumstances and he had learned God's purpose...

**"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." 2 Corinthians 12:9**

Jennifer Rothschild shared her story of learning to submit to God's plan for her life in *Decision* magazine a few years ago.



In her early years, Jennifer dreamed of a career as an artist – she loved to draw and she had talent. But the disease *retinitis pigmentosa* which caused the degeneration of her retinas stole her sight from her when she was a young teenager. On the day she and her parents received the diagnosis, their ride home in the car had been silent. A hundred questions swirled in her mind, all them rooted in one question: What kind of future will I have? Jennifer wrote...

*Finally, we arrived home. I went straight to my old upright piano in the living room, and the silence of the hospital and the ride home was broken as I began to play. I had taken a few years of piano lessons and could sight-read in simple keys. But on this day I could no longer see the sheet music. Instead, I played by ear for the very first time. The song that filled my living room that day—the song that fills my heart to this day—was that beloved hymn "It Is Well with My Soul."*

*It was a miracle that on that very dark day, God gave me hope and light through the gift of playing by ear. But the greatest miracle wasn't that I played "It Is Well with My Soul;" the greatest miracle was that, because I was a Christian, it really was well with my soul. With such a concise statement, God gave new color to my life. Blindness has remained with me; it's still not well with my circumstance, but God has made it well with my soul.*

*One of the hardest lessons I've had to learn is that God uses painful circumstances in our lives for good. My hero, Joni Eareckson Tada, who has been in a wheelchair since she was a teenager, makes this point well when she says that **God allows what he hates in order to accomplish what he loves.** I know that God's heart is broken when he sees our hearts break. I believe that just as Jesus wept at Lazarus' tomb, Jesus weeps when he sees us cry tears of loss. I'm convinced that God is well acquainted with the sorrow and struggles that I experience. Yet, at the same time, he loves me enough—and this is why I'm so loyal to him—to let me encounter sorrow, taste bitter emotions, and feel loss. He trusts me to be a good steward of that sorrow. He loves me enough to let me experience that pain so that he can accomplish something he loves—which for me has been a deeper character and a more eternal perspective.*

*I am convinced that God's grace has sustained me. If healing were sufficient, God would have provided it. If deliverance were sufficient, God would have delivered me. But he's allowed me to live with blindness, yet live equally with the sufficiency of his grace, and that grace shows up in different ways on different days. But in whatever way it shows up, it has always been truly sufficient. It may never be well with our circumstances, but through God's grace, it can always be well with our souls.* © 2007 PreachingToday.com This article was adapted from Decision magazine, May 2007; ©2007 Billy Graham Evangelistic Association; used by permission, all rights reserved. Jennifer Rothschild, "Faith Through the Darkness," Decision (May 2007)

**The third** lesson we need to learn if we want to be “thermostats” instead of “thermometers” is that...



## **Contentment is the result of acting on the power of God in our lives**

This calls for **the exercise of our faith**

Paul wrote...

**“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” Philippians 4:13**

This is not just a statement of theological fact – this is a declaration of a life principle. This is the kind of truth that needs to be written on a card and tucked into the frame of our mirrors; it’s a declaration that needs to be written on our fridges and over our sinks; it’s the kind of statement that makes a good screensaver on your computer; it might even be a good bumper sticker. Above all, it’s a truth that we need to declare to ourselves when we face the downs and the ups of life, but especially when we face the downs!

It’s short, it’s necessary and it’s true. Say it with me...

**“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”**

And again...

**“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”**

1. “I can do all things...”

One Bible scholar (Gerald Hawthorne) expands Paul’s declaration this way...

**“I have the power** to face all conditions of life, humiliation or exaltation, plenty to eat or not enough, wealth or poverty. **I can endure** all these things. **I have the resources** in myself to master them. **I am strong** to face them down. **I can prevail** over and be master of all the circumstances of life.”

Because Christ in me gives me the strength! Paul’s experience of the strength of Jesus was an experience of power in the midst of weakness NOT power that removed weakness. Paul wrote to the Corinthians...

**“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.”**

**2 Corinthians 4:7-12**



We are afflicted, perplexed, persecuted and struck down, but we carry on because Jesus helps us through. We aren't often delivered from the circumstances, but Jesus enables us to make it through them.

Larry Crabb tells a story from his childhood that illustrates the way in which Jesus' strength is made manifest in us in our weakness. Crabb wrote...

*One Saturday afternoon, I decided I was a big boy and could use the bathroom without anyone's help. So I climbed the stairs, closed and locked the door behind me, and for the next few minutes felt very self-sufficient.*

*Then it was time to leave. I couldn't unlock the door. I tried with every ounce of my three-year-old strength, but I couldn't do it. I panicked. I felt again like a very little boy as the thought went through my head, "I might spend the rest of my life in this bathroom."*

*My parents—and likely the neighbors—heard my desperate scream.*

*"Are you okay?" Mother shouted through the door she couldn't open from the outside. "Did you fall? Have you hit your head?"*

*"I can't unlock the door!" I yelled. "Get me out of here!"*

*I wasn't aware of it right then, but Dad raced down the stairs, ran to the garage to find the ladder, hauled it off the hooks, and leaned it against the side of the house just beneath the bathroom window. With adult strength, he pried it open, then climbed into my prison, walked past me, and with that same strength, turned the lock and opened the door.*

*"Thanks, Dad," I said—and ran out to play.*

*That's how I thought the Christian life was supposed to work. When I get stuck in a tight place, I should do all I can to free myself. When I can't, I should pray. Then God shows up. He hears my cry—"Get me out of here! I want to play!"—and unlocks the door to the blessings I desire.*

*Sometimes he does. But now, no longer three years old and approaching sixty, I'm realizing the Christian life doesn't work that way. And I wonder, are any of us content with God? Do we even like him when he doesn't open the door we most want opened—when a marriage doesn't heal, when rebellious kids still rebel, when friends betray, when financial reverses threaten our comfortable way of life, when the prospect of terrorism looms, when health worsens despite much prayer, when loneliness intensifies and depression deepens, when ministries die?*



*God has climbed through the small window into my dark room. But he doesn't walk by me to turn the lock that I couldn't budge. Instead, he sits down on the bathroom floor and says, "Come sit with me!" He seems to think that climbing into the room to be with me matters more than letting me out to play.*

*I don't always see it that way. "Get me out of here!" I scream. "If you love me, unlock the door!"*

*Dear friend, the choice is ours. Either we can keep asking him to give us what we think will make us happy—to escape our dark room and run to the playground of blessings—or we can accept his invitation to sit with him, for now, perhaps, in darkness, and to seize the opportunity to know him better and represent him well in this difficult world.* (© 2007 PreachingToday.com Larry Crabb, *The Pressure's Off* (WaterBrook Press, 2002); pp. 222-223; submitted by John Beukema, Chambersburg, Pennsylvania)

Are we content with God? Is he our great treasure? Is he our pearl of great price? You see, that's what Paul means when he wrote to Timothy about "great gain." God himself is our "great gain"! Paul wrote to the Philippians...

**"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 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" Philippians 3:7-8**

Jesus himself, not the things he gives, is our "great gain" and treasure. Are we content with him?

Paul tells us that our spiritual maturity is measured by the answer we give to that question. Contentment is a learned response. It doesn't come naturally.

- Have we **learned** the lesson of contentment? Have our minds been engaged in learning from **God's teaching process** in our lives?
- Have we **submitted** ourselves to **God's providence** in any and every circumstance in our lives?
- Are we **exercising** the truth of our **faith** declaration that "I can do all things through him who gives me strength"? **Are we content with what God has given us in Jesus?**

*The great missionary explorer, David Livingstone, served in Africa from 1840 until his death in 1873. ...*

*Livingstone was eager to travel into the uncharted lands of Central Africa to preach the gospel. On one occasion, the famous nineteenth-century missionary and explorer arrived at the edge of a large territory that was ruled by a tribal chieftain. According to tradition, the chief would come out to meet him there;*



*Livingstone could go forward only after an exchange was made. 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 this goat. In return, the chief gave him a carved stick, shaped like a walking stick.*

*Livingstone was most disappointed. He began to gripe to God about what he viewed as a stupid walking cane. What could it do for him compared to the goat that kept him well? Then one of the local men explained, "That's not a walking cane. It's 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."*

*The man was right. God opened Central Africa to Livingstone, and as successive evangelists followed him wave after wave of conversions occurred.*

*Sometimes, in our disappointment over what we don't have, we fail to appreciate the significance of what God has given us. (©2007 PreachingToday.com John Beukema, Chambersburg, Pennsylvania; source: Robert Lewis and Wayne Cordeiro, The Culture Shift (Jossey-Bass, 2005), pp. 1-2)*

**“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” Philippians 4:13**

Let's pray.

- **Invitation to prayer**
- **Closing Song:** You Are My All In All // The Power of the Cross
- **Benediction**