

“Cultivating Contentment and Simplifying Our Lives” Pastor Lindsey Carnes

Stewardship Sermon #3      November 6, 2016 Luke 12:13-21, 1 Timothy 6:6-10, Phil. 4:8-13

PP #1 Bad weather threatening crops



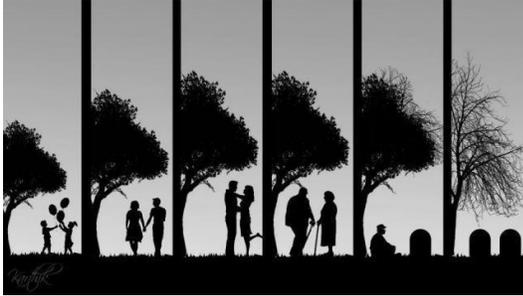
A long time ago there was a farmer who woke up one morning to find that his one and only horse had run away. His neighbors heard about it and came to console him. “How are you going to plow your fields with no horse? How terrible that your horse ran away!” The farmer only replied, “Well, it could be bad, or it could be good.”

A couple of days later, the farmer woke to see that his horse had returned and had brought three other wild horses with him. The neighbors saw the new horses in the pasture and ran next door. “Wow! It’s a miracle! You now have enough horses to expand your fields!” The farmer only replied, “It could be good, it could be bad.”

The farmer was able to plow even more fields and they yielded a bumper crop. Then just at harvest time, the farmer’s only son went out to hitch up one of the wild horses. The horse kicked him and broke the young man’s leg in two places. The neighbors heard about it (these are nosy neighbors, by the way) and they came running over. “How tragic! Your son’s leg is broken. Now you have no one to help you bring in the harvest. It’s all going to rot in the fields.” The farmer only replied, “Well, it could be bad, it could be good.”

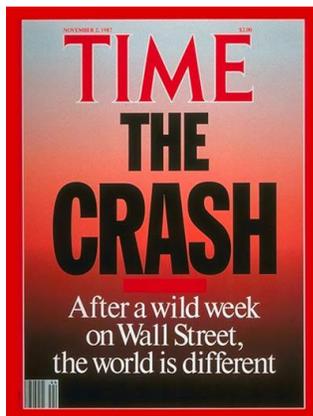
A week later, that country became embroiled in a civil war and every young man in the area was drafted into the service. Everyone except the farmer’s son, who was laid up with his broken leg. Many of the neighbors lost their sons in battle, while his son was saved.” The farmer could only say, “It could be good, it could be bad.”

**PP#2** Life and Death



When I read Paul's letters, sometimes I get the sense that he's a lot like that farmer. He is never too high or too low. He sees both prosperity and poverty, safety and danger, even life and death as being both good and bad. In today's passage he tells the Philippians, "I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need." It's that secret that we want to address today.

### PP#3 The Secret the Time: Wall Street Crash



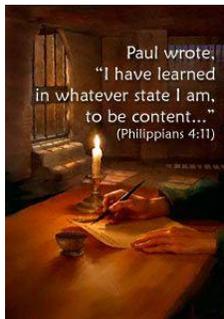
There are a lot of people out there claiming to have the secret to prosperity. A couple of years back, Oprah got a lot people excited about a book called "The Secret," which proposed a way for everyone to get what they want out of life. It became a runaway best seller as people were snatching it up in order to learn how to get rich and get happy.

What was the secret? Here it is (and I'm paraphrasing): You can have anything you want if you just want it bad enough. You put your positive energy out there into the Universe (no God in The Secret, just the Universe) and everything you want will be attracted to you.

That was 2007. A year or so later, the stock market crashed—largely because people wanted things they couldn't afford. So much for The Secret.

Paul understood the secret a whole lot differently. It was not about wanting things, it was about wanting to know Christ.

PP#4 Paul in prison, Phil 4:11 Paul is content



He writes this letter to the Philippians from jail, which puts his words into perspective. In fact, up to this point, Paul had already spent time in places and circumstances that were anything but happy. In 2 Cor. 11, for example, Paul lays out his travel itinerary:

Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, <sup>26</sup> I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. <sup>27</sup> I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. <sup>28</sup> Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

And yet, to the Philippians, Paul says, “I have learned to be content with whatever I have.”

The Greek word here that's translated as “content” refers to self-sufficiency—the idea that one doesn't need any assistance and isn't dependent upon outside circumstances. The context of this passage is Paul thanking the Philippians for a monetary gift (which is interesting, because they are very poor for the most part). In this thank you letter, Paul is basically saying, “Thanks for the gift, but know that I'm really good with whatever I have. I'm not going to be dependent upon

you, I'm really dependent upon God. I've learned that things have a tendency to work out for me one way or the other. Plenty or want—could be good, could be bad.

#### PP#5 Contentment in all circumstances



Now, it's important to say here that Paul does not see contentment as being a kind of resignation to one's circumstances. It's not, "Oh, well, this bad stuff is happening to me. It guess it's my lot in life." Quite the contrary. Instead of a mere acceptance of one's circumstances, it's an active choice. He chooses this attitude because, as he says back in chapter 2, this was the same attitude of Jesus, who "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave" and "humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death" (2:7-8). When he was down, in prison, in pain, Paul knew that Jesus had been there before him.

Go over to chapter 3. Here we see Paul talking about the supposedly "good" things that had characterized his life before his encounter with Jesus. Look at v. 4 – "If anyone has confidence in the flesh, I have more." He was circumcised as a Jew, an Israelite, a member of a tribe, a Pharisee, a man who was "blameless."

But, Paul says, when he met Christ, he saw all of that impressive stuff as "loss" and "rubbish" in comparison to knowing Christ and being like him. Verse 10—"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection," wrote Paul—everything else paled in comparison. As to circumstances, it could be good, it could be bad—it didn't matter because Christ was all that mattered and Paul believed that, in Christ, everything he needed would be supplied. It was this kind of contentment that enabled him to be content.

#### PP#6 Philippians 4:13

I CAN DO **all things**  
THROUGH  
*Christ*  
WHO **STRENGTHENS ME**  
*Philippians 4:13*

It enabled him to say (4:13) “I can do all things through [Christ] who gives me strength.” Paul wasn’t content with who he was at the moment—he was always striving for the prize of knowing Christ—but because of Christ, he could be content in any circumstance.

And that’s the secret to contentment—it’s all about knowing Christ. We push aside our anxiety about things and are content with Christ. It’s that kind of contentment that brings peace.

PP#7 1 Tim. 6:6



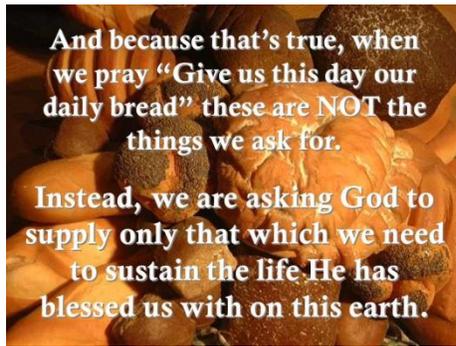
In 1 Timothy 6:6, for example, Paul writes to his young apprentice: “There is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. Paul cuts everything down to the basics: Godliness + contentment = peace.



Circumstances and things will come and go—some will be good, some will be bad—but in the midst of it all, we recognize that our lives are defined by God and cared for by God—the one

who gave us the ultimate gift of Christ Jesus. It is this God who holds everything in his hand. Notice how Paul closes the letter (v. 19) – “And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

#### PP#8 Daily bread



We’ve been talking in this series about how we can change our attitudes about our finances. I would argue that that change begins when we choose contentment and trust over anxiety and discontent. We learn to be content when we pay more attention to our needs than our wants. We learn that managing money is a spiritual discipline. We learn that we are stewards of God’s riches. We learn that even when we are un-faithful, God is always faithful.

And because that’s true, when we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” these are not the things we ask for. Instead, we are asking God to supply only that which we need to sustain the life He has blessed us with on earth. True contentment means that we put our trust in God for our daily bread. When we are content, we can live gratefully, generously, because we know that God is the one who supplies us. And God is sufficient for all.

#### PP#9 ConTENTment or DisconTENTment



Which tent will you choose to live in? DisconTENTment or ConTENTment? “Lord, help me to be grateful for what I have, to remember that I don’t need most of what I want, and that joy is found in simplicity and generosity.” Things could be good, or could be bad. God is always good!