

Sermon Title: Contentment
Scripture Text: Philippians 4:10-14 (Philippians #15)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 1-30-11

Please join me in Philippians Chapter 4, for what appears to be our next-to-final visit to this wonderful little letter.

As we have been making our way through Chapter 4, when we got to Chapter 4, Verse 6, we saw the immediate Cure For Anxiety—what to do when something happens that makes you feel anxious. There is an immediate cure to take: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (vss. 6-7, NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted).

Then the next two verses are not the *emergency* Cure For Anxiety, it's the long-range prevention—or, the Inoculation For Anxiety: Fill your mind with the right things—"pure, lovely, truthful," all of those things—and *live* by them and *practice* the things that you see people doing who live in light of those things (Heb. 13:7), and you can *prevent* much anxiety in your life.

Well, we are not *quite* through with that theme of how incredibly practical God's Word and God's truth *is* in your life. The *opposite* of being "anxious" is being "content" in your circumstances, *and* it is possible for you every day. From Paul's example here, and what he wrote to his friends in Philippi, you can learn how to cultivate and practice contentment.

And you will find that, like dealing with anxiety, contentment depends upon decisions *you* make (see Jn. 14:1a); it *does not* depend on your external circumstances. It ultimately boils down to your answer to one question: Who is God? We will see that as we make the application today.

We are going to look at Verses 10 through 14, and ask:

How Content *Can* You Be?
and, What Is The Secret To Contentment?

First of all, Verse 10. We are going to transition now into the final little paragraph of Philippians that we are going to spend two sessions on. Paul says this: "But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity."

They had sent him a gift to help with his ministry expenses. Even though he was in jail—he was under house arrest—he was carrying on a lot of ministry. The people of Philippi had supported him, and that introduces a thought I am going to deal with *next time* on our final visit to Philippians: The majority of the rest of the book is Paul acknowledging and thanking them for financial contributions they had sent him. So like I said, we will deal with that next time.

It is the *next* verse that introduces our theme for today. Paul says: "Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am."

Sermon Title: Contentment
Scripture Text: Philippians 4:10-14 (Philippians #15)

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The key phrase here is "learned to be content." Paul's joy was *not* tied to whether he had received a financial contribution or not; it had nothing to do with that. And he understood what it meant to be content; and he said, "This is something *I have learned*." This is something you *have* to learn; it does not come automatically. It is because of hard work you do—mentally, emotionally, spiritually—to discover how to *practice* the contentment that only God can give.

Now, what does it mean to be "content"? Well, the actual word that is translated "content" here is related to having enough of something, or being self-sufficient (e.g., Prov. 30:8b; Lk. 3:14; 1 Tim. 6:6-8; Heb. 13:5).

One man who devoted his whole life to studying Bible words says this: "The word indicates independence of external circumstances, and often means 'the state of one who supports himself without aid from others.' The word indicates an inward self-sufficiency as opposed to the lack or the desire of outward things."

Paul is saying this is something on the *inside*, and it is something that God gives. You can think you are self-sufficient in the world, but Paul "learned to be content" in *every* situation. You are "content" when your understanding of God allows you to recognize *His* provision for you as sufficient and proper and appropriate (Ps. 23:1; Ps. 34:10; 84:11c).

So, the answer to the question "How content can you be?"—well, what did Paul say? He said, "I have learned to be content in *whatever circumstances I am*." Now, that is an *all-inclusive* statement.

Bear in mind: The guy who wrote this was in jail unjustly. "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am." You *can* be—and you *should* be, if you belong to Christ—content in whatever circumstances you find yourself in. Or, let's get real about this: If you are *not* content—right now, today—in your circumstances, you are not obeying God. He says you *can* be, you *should* be (1 Tim. 6:8; Heb. 13:5).

Now, to be content does *not* mean complacency; it does not mean that you don't care. It does not mean "to be apathetic"—without *feeling* about anything. It does not mean "to be unmotivated." It does not mean that you lack desire to improve anything. I mean, if you want to plant flowers in your yard to make it look better, that doesn't mean that you are spiritually sick because you are not content with bare dirt.

But in the context, to be "content" clearly *does* mean that you are without anxiety about your circumstances. It is all connected. Paul was not motivated by a sense of needing more things; he simply proclaims his contentment to the Philippians as he introduces this "Thank You" to them for the gift that he had received.

I'll never forget being in India, being shown where some people were taking the Gospel to their neighborhoods; and I was taken to a village where all the houses are made of mud. Now, that works really good *in the dry season*. And then comes the *wet season*—and then all the mud houses become *mud*, minus the houses. And they rebuild them again out of the mud.

Sermon Title: Contentment
Scripture Text: Philippians 4:10-14 (Philippians #15)

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And we looked down the street, and there are three houses that are decorated and whitewashed. And they said, "It's pretty easy to tell where the Christians live in *this* village isn't it?" See: Content with their circumstances, but wanting to give God glory for His provision.

Paul tantalizes us with a little bit more explanation of what he means by "learn[ing]" how "to be content in" all of your "circumstances." See if what we are about to read matches up with your life, and the way that the people around you would describe you.

How Content Can You Be? You can be *fully* "content" in every "circumstance."

So the obvious question—Verses 12 through 14—What Is The Secret? Let's look at Verse 12—"I know how to get along with humble means"—I guess a guy in jail would know that—"and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need." This contentment he is talking about allows you to live *above* your circumstances, rather than *under* your circumstances (cf. 2 Cor. 4:18).

A famous preacher once said to a friend he knew was going through a tough time, "How are you doing?" And he said, "Well, fine—under the circumstances." And the preacher said, "*What are you doing under there?*" Well, there is some *truth* in that, isn't there? You don't *have to be* "under" your "circumstances"!

Paul said: "I know how to get along with *humble* means"—that means being brought low; and here he is referring to physical things. "I have 'done without.' "

"Prosperity" is from a word that means "overflowing" or "abounding with things." And we know that Paul had been an extremely highly trained, well-educated, widely respected Pharisee. It is quite likely that he was very wealthy before his conversion, because that is who that world played out.

But *since then*, he had endured *unspeakable* horrors (Acts 9:16). You talk about somebody whose life did not get *better* on Earth when he came to Christ, how about the Apostle Paul? (cf. 1 Cor. 15:19) Look at some of his testimony: Second Corinthians 11, starting at Verse 23—I was "beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure" (vss. 23-27; cf. 2 Cor. 6:4-5). Nice testimony! Who wants to sign up for that job? You see, you have to have a heavenly perspective!

And *then* he says—and here is the hard part—"Apart from such *external* things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches." (vs. 28). But through it all, Paul could write from jail: "I have learned the secret of being... content."

Sermon Title: Contentment
Scripture Text: Philippians 4:10-14 (Philippians #15)

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The word that is translated "learned" there in Verse 12—in "learned the secret"—carries the idea of being initiated and instructed. You know what a "secret" club is—the Masons, or the Mormons copied a lot from the Masons—you have to be sworn in, and you are sworn to secrecy, and then you work your way up, and with each level you get secret handshakes or code words or passwords to take you into the next level. This is the word that describes a process like that, only this is not some mystical thing. What Paul means is that this is something that you *gain by experience*, you gain by going through it; you learn this, in part, by living a life like his testimony in Second Corinthians Chapter 11.

But, do you see the frustrating lack of detail here in Verse 12? "I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need." And you want to say, "Okay! Give me the bullet points. What is it?"

Well, the truth is, he does not spell it out. But he gives you a great clue in the next verse, Verse 13—"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." The secret of being content is a Person: It is Jesus Christ dwelling in you because you are a child of God (Jn. 6:56; 14:20, 23; 17:22-23, 26; Rom. 8:9; Gal. 2:20; Col. 1:27; 3:11). Whatever needs to be done, you can do because you are "in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 1:3, 19-20).

Now, that is the context of "all things": "all things that I need to do." "Do not be anxious for *anything*, but in *everything*..." He is talking about the things that impact your life. This does not mean that because you are "in Christ," you can "leap tall buildings with a single bound," okay? But it means you can *handle* anything you need to (cf. Ps. 119:32). Whatever you need to do, you can do it because you are "in Christ," you can do it because "Christ" is "in you." His "grace is sufficient" for you—like the same Apostle wrote in Second Corinthians 12:9—"And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me."

Paul was talking about something that really annoyed him, and he kept praying about it, and this is what he learned: "My grace is sufficient for you." You either believe that, or you don't (Jos. 1:9; Is. 43:2; Jer. 1:8; 1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 3:5; Col. 1:29; Heb. 4:16). And it has *profound* ramifications for how your experience will be on Earth.

Or, as he said in the context of explaining how all his friends at one time abandoned him in the midst of some intense persecution—he was in jail when he wrote Philippians; he got out of jail; he travelled some more; he was rearrested; he was back in prison; and the last letter he wrote was Second Timothy; the last chapter of the last letter that he wrote was Second Timothy Chapter 4, and look at what he says there in Verse 17, after a time when friends had abandoned him: "But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth."

It is for *that* reason that Paul was unfazed by whatever trials *or* blessings came his way. "The secret" of being "content" is closely tied to understanding the sufficiency of God's grace (e.g., 1 Tim. 1:14; 2 Pet. 1:3; cf. Eph. 3:16; Col. 1:11).

Sermon Title: Contentment
Scripture Text: Philippians 4:10-14 (Philippians #15)

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In Second Corinthians 12:10, he says: "Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."—meaning: When I am past my human weakness, I have only the strength of God to lean on (cf. 2 Cor. 1:9; 4:7). So he says: "I am well"—what is that word there?—"content."

How many of you say, "You know, I would be content *if only* I was a little weaker, *if only* people would *insult* me more, *if only* there was more distress"—and that word means "being squeezed"—"*if only* I could be persecuted, *if only* my life was more difficult 'for Christ's sake,' *then* I could be content!" You do not *seek* those things! (cf. Matt. 10:23a) But Paul says, "I *understand* God's sufficiency!"

Now in Philippians, he transitions to his little "Thank You" note for the support that he had received; and he was, indeed, thankful. He did not want the Philippians to get the wrong idea that just because he understood the goodness of God, he did not want them to send a check next month. He still wanted them to be faithful with their generosity, and so he says in Verse 14—"Nevertheless, *you have done well* to share with me in my affliction."

So, this last section of Philippians has two prongs to it: the "contentment" side and the "generosity" side. We will deal with the "generosity" side next week. Today, we are going to finish talking about the "contentment" side.

And you can tell that since I said we are going through Verses 10 through 14—and I just read you Verse 14, and it's only 15 minutes into a sermon—we are going to linger a little bit. We are going to talk about some application.

The secret of contentment is *rooted in theology*. There is a *very close connection* between this passage and the preceding passage that deals with anxiety. Just as anxiety is the *symptom*—physical, emotional, and spiritual—it is the symptom that results primarily from believing lies, contentment comes from truth lived out in your life. If you are not content, one of two things is true: You either don't know God through Christ yet, *or* you are not *living* by what you *know*. It is *that* simple! It is *that* black and white!

The question that you need to answer is: Who is your God? How you answer that question determines a lot about your emotional stability and your priorities in life. People who believe that God wants them to exterminate people who don't believe properly strap bombs to themselves and blow themselves up in public places. That is *theology at work*! Call it *anything* you want to—it is *evil*, it is *open evil*, it is the *worst* kind of human evil—and it is *theology at work*!

What people believe determines how they act! And it is not what people *say* they believe, it is what they *truly* believe (Matt. 7:21; Jn. 6:64, 70; 2 Cor. 4:13; Titus 1:16; 1 Jn. 2:4). A lot of people can sign eloquent doctrinal statements, and then go home and *fret* all day—because the connection is not there (Jn. 15:5).

Who is your God? How you answer that determines almost everything (e.g., Ps. 9:10; 36:1; Prov. 13:19b; 16:6b; Dan. 11:32; Jn. 5:40, 42; 14:23a, 24a; 17:3).

Sermon Title: Contentment
Scripture Text: Philippians 4:10-14 (Philippians #15)

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Now, you who are veterans of Heritage Bible Church know this famous statement that I have taught you, excerpted from the Westminster Shorter Catechism. I know some of you know this so well that if I say it, your mouth can be moving along with me: "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." That is all the Westminster guys could come up with. Harris adds: "and sovereignty and love."

That is who God really is, and that is *true*. It was written down by wise men centuries ago. It *deserves* to be memorized if you have not memorized it. But, *do you live* as if it is true? A lot of people who would read that and say, "Amen!"—when it gets right down to it, *live* as if they believe in a mythical God.

You know, Satan does not mind if you believe in God—not at all; he does some of his *finest work* in the name of various gods (e.g., Lev. 17:7; Deut. 32:17; 2 Chr. 11:15; Ps. 106:37-38; 1 Cor. 10:20; 2 Cor. 11:14-15; Rev. 9:20)—as long as he can mix some error into your understanding of who God is (e.g., Ex. 32:4; 1 Kings 12:28). He knows that what you believe about God actually determines how you think and the decisions that you make (e.g., Job 1:1; Ps. 10:4, 11, 13). And you might be surprised how easy it is to pick up some ideas about God that are lies—that are actually lies.

Why *did* a murderer blow himself up in Domodedovo Airport last week? I'm glad he was a week late from when *we* were there—because I would love to be with the Lord, but I don't think I'm done with *you* yet. Why? Because of believing bad theology, and believing it to the point of commitment.

Every decision you make is ultimately based on what you actually believe (Prov. 14:2). Let me illustrate:

Sometimes our prayers reflect that we have let little lies creep in around the edges of the truth. Suppose, for example, you praying for your husband in the morning: "Lord, please be with Ralph at work today. I know it is going to be a tough day for him; I know he is going to be under a lot of pressure to compromise Your Word." God bless Ralph, if you are praying for him that way. But you are praying for him—that's good. But think about the beginning of that prayer—how *easily* that rolls off our lips: "Please be with Ralph." What does that imply? God might or might not be with Ralph. And what does *that* mean? Isn't that prayer—"God, be with Your child, Ralph"—isn't that an admission that you don't believe what the Scripture says? Hebrews 13:5-6—"He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,' so that we confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?'"

Now, *I know what you mean* when you say, "Lord, be with Jim, be with Ralph"—whatever. I know what you mean! But, why not *say it* in a way that does not *sound like you don't believe what God says*? "I will *never* desert you, *nor* will I ever forsake you!" "Oh, Lord, please be with him." There are practical ways to pray, but that is a *bad one*! Jesus said it in the Great Commission: Matthew 28:20—"Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." As long as Ralph isn't getting on an airplane, if he is staying "lo," it says right there that the Lord is going to *be with him*!

Sermon Title: Contentment
Scripture Text: Philippians 4:10-14 (Philippians #15)

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Do you get it? We put ourselves into a lot of nail-biting uncertainty by praying according to *little, tiny lies*—little shreds of doubt about God, rather than according to the truth that He has told us "once for all" (Jude 3).

Now, I don't want to leave Ralph un-prayed-for, but maybe something like this: "Lord, remind Ralph of Your faithfulness and Your presence today. Prompt him to call on You today for the wisdom that You promised to give Your children. Help him keep his desire focused on pleasing You, regardless of what the people around him do or say. Please bring glory to Yourself through Ralph today by helping him to serve You and do as You say." You see: Pray according to things that *God says are true!* (2 Sam. 7:25) Asking God to "be with" a child of His is unnecessary, because He has already settled that issue!

But it is *worse* than unnecessary, because it sounds like we doubt what God has said is true. In other words: We can pray and talk and act in such a way that reveals that we are actually under the influence of a lie!

Now, like I said, you might say, "Oh, you know what I mean when I pray like that"—and I *do*. But if you *mean* something different than what you *say*, why not say it differently? Because when we repeat things, they become *familiar* to us. Repeat *truth!* Remember Verses 8 and 9 here in Philippians Chapter 4? "Marinate your brain"—that's a paraphrase—"Marinate your brain in things that are 'true' and 'pure' and 'lovely' and 'righteous,' and all of that."

Let's try another one. This one—oh, my "flabber" is completely "gasted" when I hear this one: Suppose we are at a Bible study, or we are hanging around after church, and a person is talking about an important issue coming up—say, for example: The church is seeking the permits that they need to be able to build a building in a certain part of town, and it requires a special act of a certain board. Did you ever hear something like this? "We need a lot of people to pray that this decision will go our way. We *especially* need a lot of people to pray *Tuesday* at 10 o'clock, because *that* is when we meet with the Executive Board."

I am all for praying about the decision. I am all for praying that God's will be done. Just look at how Esther and all of her people under her influence fasted and prayed "*for three days*" before she went before King Ahasuerus to seek to spare the Jews from genocide (Est.4:16). *That's good*. Praying like that is an act of humility and contrition and repentance and dependence upon God. That is the *good* practice of *good* doctrine.

But, to believe that the ultimate outcome of a decision rests on *how many people pray*, or *on the exact words that they use*, or *on the exact timing of their prayers* reflects a *whole flock of lies about God!* Talking like that *denies that God is eternal!* If you pray about something Monday night, and then get a good night's sleep, I don't think God has the *slightest problem whatsoever* with dealing with that situation Tuesday Morning at 10 o'clock. God is not bound by time (Ps. 90:4; 2 Pet. 3:8). If you are *moved* to stay up all night praying, *that's fine!* But, do you understand: It is *God's will*, it is *God's power*—that He is sovereign (Ps. 103:19; Eph. 1:11), and He is *not* bound by time?

Sermon Title: Contentment
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Date: 1-30-11

Fantastic words from Isaiah 46 that should be remembered: Isaiah 46:9-11—"Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, *declaring the end from the beginning*, and from ancient times *things which have not been done*." "Before" it *begins*, He "knows" how it is going to end (Ps. 139:4). Why? Because He is sovereign, and He is not bound by time! Is that mind-boggling? Yes. But do you live by it? He continues: "Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it."

So, don't pray—don't *act*—as if God is not eternal—like He is just your slightly bigger, slightly stronger buddy going through the same trials that you are. Don't pray as if God is not "omniscient"—that means that God knows everything (Ps. 147:5b; Jn. 16:30; 21:17).

Friends, the outcome of a situation *is not* primarily dependent upon our prayers! Now, does that sound a little bit haywire to you, to say that in Christian circles? Well, to be sure, our prayers are part of the process that God uses to do His will (see Ezek. 36:37; Jn. 14:13; 2 Cor. 1:11; Eph. 6:19; Phil. 1:19, 22). But God knows *far more* than we know (Ps. 147:5b), He knows *better* than we do, and He loves us too much to give us what we *want* if He knows that there is a *better* plan that we have not had a chance to discover yet (see Gen. 50:20; Deut. 8:16; Rom. 9:22-23; 2 Cor. 12:7-10; Jas. 1:2-4).

The kind of praying that often goes on in situations like my illustration imply that there are two choices: Either God is going to *come through for us*, or God is going to *let us down*. If you have anxiety over a decision in the hand of God, you are believing lies that insult the very *character of God Himself!* (see Deut. 32:4; Ps. 119:68a; Dan. 4:37)

My friends: God has *never 'let anyone down'!* And oh, how often I have heard that. "So-and-so is bitter because she prayed, and God let her down." Oh, really? That means that that person does not understand God very well. If you think otherwise about God, then you need to repent of your blasphemy *today!* *He is GOD!* He is *omniscient!* And He is *all-powerful!* (Is. 42:12) So, don't pray in a way that denies that God is omniscient *or* omnipotent—that means that God is all-powerful (Jer. 32:17; Lk. 1:37; Matt. 19:26).

When you have an important decision before you, and the power to make the decision is *out of your control*—you know, there are some things you *can* decide, and you "ask" God for "wisdom" in that case (Jas. 1:5)—but if somebody else has to decide, and it is completely out of your control, well, *pray...and trust God*. Do your homework so that you are well-prepared to make the truth known in the situation. "Speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). "Submit" to "every authority" over you, which is part of your submission to God (1 Pet. 2:13). Pray about it. Pray about it *as much as you like!* And then, "wait" on God to give you *His* answer through the one in charge (Ps. 27:14). There is no *nail-biting* necessary! It's not necessary to lose sleep over such things (Ps. 37:7a). He is in control.

You say, "Well, what if only *the one in charge* on Earth can make the decision?" Proverbs 21:1—"The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes." Do you think maybe *that* thought was on Esther's mind before she went before *the King*—the only one who could prevent the slaughter of her people? Yeah! God is in control of those things (Dan. 4:35).

Sermon Title: Contentment
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You say, "But there are a lot of wicked kings." Um-hm. Do you think they thwart God? (Prov. 19:21; 21:30; Is. 14:27; 22:22; 43:13; Lam. 3:37) Do you think they don't reap the eternal consequences for everything they do? (e.g., Jer. 25:12-14; Nah. 1:3b)

One of my favorite phrases I ever came up with: God is not a Cosmic Vending Machine! A lot of people treat praying like they treat a vending machine: "If I go to the vending machine, and I put in just the right amount of money, and I push the right buttons in the right order, and the machine has been stocked—I get what I want." A lot of people think, "I have to put in just the right amount of prayer in just the right words to push just the right buttons with God in the right sequence at the right time to get what I want." There is *so much wrong with that*.

Prayer is not a matter of getting what *you want* (e.g., Jas. 4:3). Prayer is a matter of having *God's glory unfold* for what *He wants!* (Jn. 14:13) The most important *change* that happens in prayer is usually *me* being changed—that God changes *my* desires!

God is also not the Cosmic Politician! It does not take massive lobbying efforts, inundating Him with the same information over and over to get His attention (Matt. 6:7). You know, He does not hold a meeting with the Trinity and say, "Jesus, what have *You* been hearing? 17 million of *My* constituents have said this!" That's *disgusting!*

What He desires more than anything is the heart of His child set on the right things (e.g., 2 Chr. 11:16; 16:9; Ps. 19:14; 51:6; 91:14; Col. 3:2; 2 Tim. 2:22; 1 Pet. 3:12).

Here is a good thing to put into your mind when you start praying: Micah 6:6-8— "With what shall I come to the Lord and bow myself before the God on high?" "*Oh, which buttons do I push?*" No, no, that is not what it means. "Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, with yearling calves? Does the Lord take delight in thousands of rams, in ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn for my rebellious acts, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" Now, look: Every single thing he mentions there is something that He prescribed, at one point or another, in the Mosaic Law—*all of it!* But, listen to this: "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

We are not in the era where any of those sacrifices will accomplish anything, because Christ the "once for all" sacrifice (Heb. 10:10) has been "slain" (Rev. 5:9; cf. Heb. 10:14). But that is still what God desires of His people (Titus 2:11-14; 1 Pet. 1:15-16; 5:5).

Another common sacred cow that keeps trampling on people's contentment—and this sacred cow *desperately* needs to be slaughtered in our talk about God, and in our thinking about Him—the *absurd* notion that you must understand what God wants in every situation. You hear the echoes of Satan's lies in some of the most spiritual-sounding phrased. I've heard people say: "I have really been praying about this. I just don't know what God is trying to do!" My friend, when you *know* what God is trying to do, would you please tell me? You would have to *be Him!* (see Is. 55:8-9) He has told you *every single thing you need* for "life and godliness" here on Earth (2 Pet. 1:3). You don't need anything else!

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I hear people say, "I just don't know what God is trying to tell me." Hey, when you know the Bible word perfect, by memory, from beginning to end, and you can say, "I don't know what God is trying to tell me," let's have a conversation! Again, He has *told you* everything you need to know (2 Tim. 3:16-17; cf. Ps. 19:7-11; Matt. 4:4).

In many Christian circles today, you get more funny looks if you say something like, "God knows what is best, and He is *completely* faithful in everything, and so I trust Him, and I'm not anxious about this." You're more likely to get a funny look by saying that in some circles than you are if you put on a pious display of whining that you don't know what He is trying to do because *you are not being honest with your feelings!* There are *allegedly* "Christian" psychologists that tell people, "You need to vent your anger toward God." *That* is baloney! (see Is. 45:9) You need to *repent* of your anger with God (Ezek. 33:17). Look: If you are angry with God, He is probably angry with you. Who is going to win?

Many of you are familiar with "The Chronicles Of Narnia" by C. S. Lewis—those seven children's stories, famous. They are full of allegories about God and themes of redemption. And they are great stories, besides that—a lot of things about Christian life and spiritual reality. If you haven't read them, you really would do well to do that. I could just refer you to Chapter 9 of "The Dawn Treader," and we could save a lot of time in sermon illustration.

In those [books], you know that a great lion named Aslan represents God. Here is a delightful description of Aslan which illustrates an attitude toward God that we would do well to grasp. It comes near the end of the first book, and it is in the midst of the happy ending and the great celebration of the redemption of the cities of Narnia that was purchased by Aslan Himself, who was put to death and rose again by a higher power than the ones understood by the ones who killed Him. Here is the description: "But amidst all these rejoicings, Aslan Himself quietly slipped away. And when the kings and queens noticed that He was not there, they said nothing about it. For Mr. Beaver had warned them: 'He'll be coming and going, He had said. One day you'll see Him, and another you won't. He doesn't like being tied down—and of course, He has other countries to attend to. It's quite alright! He'll often drop by. Only you mustn't press Him! He is wild, you know—not like a *tame* lion."

He *grasped* something there! If you think that God owes you an explanation of all of His purposes that intersect every little circumstance in your life, you are trying to *tame God!* You are trying to make Him *your* Guy! Well, He *is* your Guy if you are His child, but He is not *tamed*, in that sense (Ps. 100:3). He doesn't owe you an explanation of what and why (Deut. 29:29; Rom. 9:20; cf. Job 38:1-40:2), beyond what He has already given you—which is "everything" you need for "life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3).

Now, by the way: You don't *have* to read "The Chronicles Of Narnia" to get your theology. I would rather you look at the biblical version: First Timothy 6:15-16—"He...is the blessed and only *Sovereign*"—that is what Lewis is saying! He is "sovereign"; He is in control—"the King of kings and Lord of lords"—He is *above* all earthly realms (Dan. 4:17; Ps. 103:19)—"who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen."

Sermon Title: Contentment
Scripture Text: Philippians 4:10-14 (Philippians #15)

Speaker: Jim Harris
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My friends, if you want to be content, then don't go praying as if God is in trouble! Use your privilege of prayer to turn your thoughts to His thoughts, and *then* you put yourself in the position to see His "peace" envelop your soul, to "guard your hearts and your minds." *Then* you will know "the secret" of "contentment."

And remember: Some of the most basic ideas about God that you actually *must* ingrain in your thinking, and that you use every day to argue against the lies that so easily creep in, remember: God is "good" (Ps. 106:1; Mk. 10:18). "God Is Good All The Time" is the song that we sing (© 1998 by Don Moen). How often people want to throw things up in our faces: "Oh, a God of love and goodness and justice would not run a world where such terrible things happen!" Well, *read the Bible!* This world is in *revolt!* It is *upside down!*

Nadab and Abihu felt it was right above everything else for them to be able to enter the Holy of Holies. It is not a matter of what we think is right, it's who *is* right! (cf. Is. 8:20)

First John 1:5—"This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." You have *all the light you need* in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; Col. 2:30).

Matthew Chapter 6—again, back in that passage where Jesus deals with anxiety; Verse 26—"Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?" And in Verse 30—"If God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!" (cf. Rom. 8:32)

God is good! He *is* good *all the time*. And God knows what is *best*. Watch out for signs of thinking or praying that might creep into your life, that act as if you are saying, "I wonder if God knows what He is doing!" or, "He looks *to me* like He made a mistake!" Don't go *there!*

Jesus said, "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows" (Matt. 10:29-31). Hey, if He has to "number the hairs of your head," I'm a lot easier to keep track of than I used to be! *I know He is in control!*

He *knows* what is best. And God is strong—He is all-powerful. He can help! "Nothing is too hard" for Him (Jer. 32:17, ESV).

But what are the misbeliefs that show up in that realm? Have you heard somebody say something like this: "Well, God would *like* to do something about this situation, but He *can't* because the Devil is in charge in the world." Oh, yeah? (see Job 1:12; 2:6)

This made such an impact on me: When I was a young Christian, I'd heard a name of a certain TV preacher, and I turned on a TV one day. This was *so long ago*, you had to walk across the room and turn on the TV! And they had this strange little round thing on there

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you could *click-click-click* and change the picture—and about three out of four were snow. And I came across this then-famous teacher, and he'd had people send in prayer requests, and he had them in a box, and he laid his hands on them, and he said, "You know, God's hands are tied until we pray!"

The *very first sentence* I heard out of the mouth of one of the most famous, well-known preachers of that era was *blasphemy*! He was later caught in immorality. He rejected the discipline of his peers. He arrogantly continued to preach. Aren't the outcomes of misbeliefs just wonderful?

I have heard people say, "God can't do anything about it when people with 'free will' make wrong choices." Oh, *yeah*? Shall we *turn* to that "Nadab and Abihu" passage? Remember how long God took to do something about somebody who made a choice according to "free will"?—Divine lighting *incinerating* them on the spot, and not even touching their clothes! (Lev. 10:1-2) I think God can handle it (Ps. 2:4; Prov. 21:30).

Have you heard people say, "Well, God is very powerful, but sometimes in this world, evil is stronger." *Bunk!* (1 Jn. 4:4)

The reason some people are not content is that they live according to *lies*! Erase from your thoughts any doubts about God's ability to right wrongs in the universe! Replace them with the truth (Ecc. 12:14; Matt. 12:36; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; 1 Pet. 4:5; 2 Pet. 3:7)—like the "two sparrows" being "sold for a cent."

Or, Matthew 28:18—"Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying"—here are His instructions now for the whole rest of the age until He comes again: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." That ought to take care of your prayer life. I want to talk to the One who is in charge—and that would be Him! (Ps. 95:3)

Romans 8:28, 31—"We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose...What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?" You know, I can't say to just *anyone*, "God causes all things to work together for good." I can say, "If you *belong* to Him through Christ, He will use even the worst things in your life for good."

Or, Job 42:2—"I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted."

So, just catch the point: I want you to understand contentment. I want you to learn "the secret." I want your heart *not* to be troubled. So, catch on: How you think about God determines almost everything in your life. "The secret" of "contentment" is good theology applied to your life (see Ps. 86:11; Gal. 5:16; Eph. 4:1; 5:8; Col. 2:6; 1 Jn. 1:7; 2 Jn. 4).

"God *is* a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, truth, sovereignty, and love."

And therefore, my friends, you can be content!

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Let's pray:

Our Father, thank You again for the riches that are ours in Jesus Christ. Lord, there are people all around us just frozen by anxiety, people all around us torn up by a lack of contentment. There are some among us facing excruciating circumstances—physical trials, emotional trials, loved ones running away from You, people in their families attacking their faith, people who are openly wishing to do evil against Your children! Father, thank You that You know all of those things, that You hear us. May we learn to live in light of that which You have given to us through Your Son, Jesus Christ. Father, please do not let a person leave this place today without that resolute faith in You, accepting "the free gift of eternal life in Christ"—and thereby, strong to face whatever the world can deal to us. So, as we always say: Whatever You need to do in each of our hearts to make us more useful for Your glory, do it, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.