THE SECRET OF SATISFACTION

Once upon a time, there was a man who lived with his wife, two small children, and his elderly parents in a tiny hut. He tried to be patient and gracious, but the noise and crowded conditions wore him down. In desperation, he consulted the village wise man. "Do you have a rooster?" asked the wise man. "Yes," he replied. "Keep the rooster in the hut with your family, and come see me again next week." The next week, the man returned and told the wise elder that living conditions were worse than ever, with the rooster crowing and making a mess of the hut. "Do you have a cow?" asked the wise elder. The man nodded fearfully. "Take your cow into the hut as well, and come see me in a week." Over the next several weeks, the man -- on the advice of the wise elder -- made room for a goat, two dogs, and his brother's children. Finally, he could take no more, and in a fit of anger, kicked out all the animals and guests, leaving only his wife, his children, and his parents. The home suddenly became spacious and quiet, and everyone lived happily ever after.

Surely one of the greatest causes of a believer not having joy in their lives is a lack of contentment. This is hardly surprising when we consider that we are bombarded on a daily basis with advertisements whose sole purpose is to breed discontent so that we will buy their product. This week is Black Friday, when people are willing to do almost anything to save a few dollars.

How tragic it is that we live in one of the most prosperous nations on the face of the earth and we still struggle with contentment. We seem to live in a culture that is not content ever, with little or with much. It appears that the more people have the more discontent they are. Typically, the richest people in the world are the most miserable and unhappy.

Phil 4:10 I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. 11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Remember that old song from the Rolling Stones; "I Can't Get No Satisfaction." Over 60 years later you still hear that as a common complaint. All the time you meet people who are unhappy, unfulfilled, and unsatisfied. Paul says here that there is a secret to contentment.

Phil 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

What is contentment? It is not apathy, laziness or complacency. Contentment is inner peace. Like joy it is independent from circumstances. It is not based on the situation around you but your attitude within. Paul gives us four lessons to learn that will give us a satisfying, abundant life.

1. CONTENTMENT IS LEARNED

Phil 4:12 … I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation

Paul said that had learned the secret of contentment. It is not based upon environment or external factors. It is an internal state of mind. Contentment is not something that just comes naturally to us. It must be learned.

Paul says that contentment is like a secret – meaning that most people in life will never find it. All of life is a school of contentment and the problem is most people never learn the secret and they will die unfulfilled, unsatisfied and unhappy.

My crown is in my heart, not on my head; not decked with diamonds and precious stones, Nor to be seen: my crown is called content; a crown it is that seldom kings enjoy. -- William Shakespeare

So how do you lean contentment? What is the secret? I believe that contentment in this life starts by understanding that this life is not the end. It is only preparation for the next.

2 Cor 4:18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

The key to contentment is LOOK UP! Keep your eyes fixed on where you are going, not where you are or where you have been. When you realize that this life is not the end then it helps you to not feel like you need to get comfortable in it. E.g. our 'in-between house' in Virgil.

An American tourist paid a visit to a renowned Polish rabbi. He was astonished to see that the rabbi's home was only a simple room filled with books, plus a table and a cot. The tourist asked, "Rabbi, where is your furniture?" He replied, "Where is yours?" The puzzled American asked, "Mine? But I'm only a visitor here. I'm only passing through." The rabbi replied, "So am I.

Even though we are just passing through that does not mean we cannot enjoy and have satisfaction in this life. There is a joy in the journey.

A contented man is the one who enjoys the scenery along the detours. Contentment is learned.

2. CONTENTMENT IS LETTING GO

Part of learning contentment is learning how to be happy with what we have been given in life. So often we are not content with what we have because we compare ourselves with others around us. This always leads to discontentment.

Phil 4:11 … I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty … whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

Contentment is letting go of comparisons. If you want to be content, stop comparing yourself with other.

Paul knew what it was to have a lot and also a little. He knew what it was like to be hungry but also well fed. To live in abundance but also to live with nothing. That means accepting your situation good or bad, healthy or sick.

There will always be people who make more money than you, who have bigger homes, nicer cars, greater opportunities and fewer problems. So what? What other people have has no bearing at all on your own personal happiness.

My grandparents grew up during the depression and had very little. When they married and had children, they didn't want them to be as deprived as they were. So, they worked hard to get what they had. Today it seems when young people get married, they want everything right away. Things that took their parents a lifetime to accumulate. The level of expectations has changed and many people today just expect everything to be theirs from day one.

Many people believe that having more will make them happy. Howard Hughes was asked, "How much money does it take to make a man happy?" He said, "Just a little more." The problem is that as your income goes up, so does your expenses. Some of the most discontented people on the planet are also the wealthiest. Contentment is learning to live with what you have.

1 Tim 6:6 But godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. 8 But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.

Money will buy a bed but not sleep; books but not brains; food but not appetite; finery but not beauty; a house but not a home; medicine but not health; luxuries but not culture; amusements but not happiness; religion but not salvation -- a passport to everywhere but heaven.

One of the indicators I have found of contentment is whether or not you tithe. People who do not tithe are usually people who are concerned that they do not have enough financially. Let me ask you – do you give 10% of your monthly income to the church? So many people struggle financially because they rob God and do not tithe. This is something you have to plan – it is learned. You can't just show up and throw in a few dollars that you happen to have in your purse.

By the way, don't just throw cash into the offering plate. The Government of Canada will reward your giving to a church through tax savings. This multiplies the amount you are able to give. It just makes more sense to put your cash in an envelope so you can multiply its effectiveness!

Mother Teresa once said, "We have very little, so we have nothing to be preoccupied with. The more you have, the more you are occupied, the less you give. But the less you have, the freer you are. Poverty is for us a freedom. It is not a mortification, a penance. It is joyful freedom ... I find the rich much poorer. They are never satisfied. They always need something. The poor are content. That is the great difference between the rich and the poor."

Often, we find that one of the keys to contentment is when we stop thinking about what we do not have and start concentrating on what we do have.

The story is told of a farmer who had lived on the same farm all his life. It was a good farm, but with the passing years, the farmer began to tire of it. He longed for a change--for something "better." Every day he found a new reason for criticizing some feature of the old place. Finally, he decided to sell, and listed the farm with a real estate broker who promptly prepared a sales advertisement. As one might expect, it emphasized all the farm's advantages: ideal location, modern equipment, healthy stock, acres of fertile ground, etc. Before placing the ad in the newspaper, the realtor called the farmer and read the copy to him for his approval. When he had finished, the farmer cried out, "Hold everything! I've changed my mind. I am not going to sell. I've been looking for a place like that all my life."

Contentment is learned and is letting go.

3. CONTENTMENT IS LEANING ON CHRIST

Phil 4: 13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

The Amplified Version of this verse reads: "...I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him who infuses inner strength into me, that is I am self-sufficient in Christ's sufficiency."

Isn't that great! Self-sufficient in Christ's sufficiency. Instead of just depending on my own effort to make it through circumstances and my own energy, I must learn to draw on Christ's power. Have you ever felt like a situation in your life was just too overwhelming? You were just not able to cope? There are times when we do not have the strength. At times like this we need to learn to rely upon God's power working through us.

I have quoted this verse thousands and thousands of times in situations where I've felt overwhelmed and it works! Paul says I am ready for anything, I am confident. Satisfaction in life not only comes from contentment, it also comes from confidence. The confidence comes, not from your own power, but from Christ's power.

The Greek word used here is ENDUNAMOO which comes from EN which means IN and DUNAMIS which means POWER. This is the same word from which we get the word "dynamite" or "dynamo." Dynamo was the first name for electric generators. It means something which give continual and sustained power.

Paul is saying, Jesus is the dynamo of our lives. He gives me continuous energy. I don't run out. I am confident and capable to cope with the circumstances of life because I draw on Christ's power. When I plug into the power then I really come alive.

All of us face difficult situations in life. There are three kinds of circumstances we face:

a. Those I can control and I do - Switch TV channels. If you're hungry you feed yourself.

b. Those I can control and I don't - This is not excuse for laziness. Contentment is not laziness or complacency. If you can change a situation, you don't need contentment -- you need to get up and do something about it.

c. Those I cannot control - This is where you need to learn to relax and lean on God's power to get you through it.

Paul understood this principle. He lived it. He prayed numerous times that God would remove a particular weakness in his life, "a thorn in the flesh" but God did not remove it. God told him "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in (your) weakness." The word sufficient is the same word as "contentment" in Philippians. God allows you to go through problems in your life so you can learn contentment and sufficiency and He can show His power.

For after all, the best thing one can do when it's raining is to let it rain. -- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Contentment is learned, letting go and leaning on Christ.

4. CONTENTMENT IS LEARNING TO TRUST GOD

Phil 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

This is the secret of satisfaction in life. It is learning to trust in God's promises. God will meet ALL our needs. When I buy an insurance policy, I read through it to find out what is covered. When I know what is included, I don't worry because it's covered. The Bible is God's insurance policy. There are over 6000 promises in the Bible which you can claim. Many of us cannot claim them because we don't even know they're there. As you read the policy manual find out what God has guaranteed to do in your life. Once you know those guarantees you don't have to worry.

Matt 6:33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Put Jesus first and God will take care of the rest. Put Him at the center and everything else will be taken care of. The real reason that most people are unhappy, unsatisfied, and unfulfilled in life is because Jesus Christ is not the center of their lives. They are looking for fulfillment in all the wrong places. They run from this to that... looking for something that is going to satisfy them. From relationship to relationship, from job to job, from hobby to sports to recreation ... fads, therapy, books, seminar - looking for the key. But God has laid it out very clearly. You were made with a God shaped vacuum in your life and nothing will fill that void except God.

Discontentment often means that Jesus Christ is not the center of my life. When I'm not content it means I'm looking for something else.

What situation has left you unsatisfied? Is it a relationship, or occupation or possession or health? Paul said he learned the secret of being content in every situation. If you can change it, do it. If you can't then lean on Christ for strength. Contentment does not mean that you like the situation that you're in right now. You do not hear Paul saying he enjoys being in prison. He is not overjoyed with his situation.

Contentment is saying I don't care what I'm going through, with Christ's power in me, I can cope. I can handle it. I am sufficient for the problem. I don't like what I'm going through but I have learned to be content. Paul says I can handle anything with Christ's power in me. When you give up on your own power God can fill you, infuse you with new power.

Stop looking at the people around you. The grass is not always greener on the other side of the fence.

A man walked into a mental institution one day and was taken on a tour. The tour saw one cell where the man was beating his head against the padded walls. He kept saying, "Linda, Linda". The guide explained that the man was in love with Linda, and when Linda jilted him, he drifted off into the ozone. He couldn't handle it. They went to the next cell, and there was a man who was also saying, "Linda, Linda" The visitor said, "Who's he?" The guide said, "He's the man who married Linda."

The key to contentment is Christ. He is all you need. Contentment is learned, letting go, leaning on Christ and learning to trust God.

In 1904 the heir to the Borden Dairy Estate, William Borden, graduated from Chicago High School a millionaire. His parents gave him a trip around the world. During that trip he became burdened for all the hurting people he saw in Asia, Europe and the Middle East.

He made a decision to prepare for the mission field. After making that decision he indicated his desire to follow Jesus with all his heart by writing in his Bible the words, “No Reserve.”

When William Borden arrived at Yale University the next year as a freshman his passion for Christ was already kindled. He was disappointed to find the school morally bankrupt and the teaching filled with empty philosophy. During his first semester, he asked a friend to begin praying with him before breakfast. This led to other prayer groups. By his senior year, 1,000 of the 1,300 students were meeting in prayer groups. Many of those young leaders came to the Lord through that movement. Upon graduation he was offered high paying jobs. But he turned the offers down and continued to pursue God’s call on his life. While making those decisions he wrote two more words in his Bible, the words “No Retreat”.

When he completed his studies at Princeton Seminary, he sailed for the Middle East to work with the Muslims. On the way he stopped in Egypt to study Arabic. But there in Egypt he was stricken with spinal meningitis and within a month died at the age of 25. What his friends and family found written in his Bible was a great source of comfort. Added to the words previously written, “No Reserve, No Retreat” were the words, “No Regrets”.