

# Rejoice in the Lord always! Meditating on Philippians

## Never Give Up, Part 3 – The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment

Philippians 4:10-13

Faith Church of Linden

By Daniel Patz on November 16, 2025

*The following notes are a draft of my sermon. These are not my pulpit notes or a manuscript I use to preach with but something I type up before writing out my “pulpit notes”. I hope they are helpful.*

*Read the passage aloud.*

Philippians 4:10-13 ESV 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. (11) Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. (12) 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. (13) I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Brothers and sisters, imagine enjoying a taste of heaven right here on earth—shining as lights in a dark, twisted world, overflowing with peace, joy, and gratitude because we've been rescued by the grace of Jesus Christ. That's the promise of **Christian contentment**. It's not a fleeting feeling; it's a rare jewel, a divine art that transforms how we face every circumstance.

Today, as Paul wraps up his joyful letter to the Philippians, he teaches us this secret he's learned in prison chains; in a life of suffering for Christ! We'll explore it in four parts: the **Context**, the **Reality**, the **Riches**, and the **Source** of Christian contentment. Along the way, we'll draw from two Puritan treasures that unpack this truth so richly: Jeremiah Burroughs' *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* and Thomas Watson's *The Art of Divine Contentment*.

### 1. The CONTEXT of Christian Contentment (v. 10)

Paul begins with rejoicing: *"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."*

This isn't just polite thank-you note language. Paul is using Greco-Roman friendship customs to describe his deep partnership with the Philippians. From the very first day he brought the gospel to their city—birthing this church—they've supported him, including financially (as we'll see more in verses 14-20 next time).

Now, after a gap, they've sent help again through Epaphroditus. But notice: Paul's joy isn't primarily in finally getting his needs met. No—he rejoices in something deeper: the spiritual fruit this generosity credits to *their* account. He's teaching them (and us) a vital lesson for persevering in the Christian life without giving up.

Remember what he's already said? In chapter 2: "Do all things without grumbling or disputing... that you may be blameless and innocent... shining as lights in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation" (Phil. 2:14-15). He's urged them to rejoice always, to let the peace of God guard their hearts through prayer (Phil. 4:4-7). Here, he echoes 1 Timothy 6:6: "Godliness with contentment is great gain."

Paul wants us never to abandon the faith, no matter the trial. Contentment is the key to godliness that endures.

## 2. The REALITY of Christian Contentment (v. 11)

Paul clarifies: *"Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content."*

The Greek word for "content" here means "self-sufficient"—not needing outside help. The Stoics loved this idea: be unmoved by anything life throws at you. But Paul flips it! He's not *self*-sufficient; he's *God*-sufficient, *Christ*-sufficient. We'll see that in verse 13, but it's woven through all his writings—like in 2 Corinthians, where he boasts in weakness so Christ's power shines.

In this context, Paul is satisfied—truly *not needy*—whether rich or poor, hungry or full. He's writing from prison, yet he's at peace. This isn't denial; it's divine reality.

Regarding this reality – we see as Watson said – the Scholar – I have learned.

And the Scholar's lesson – to be content in whatever situation I am.

Let's walk through the verse a bit more before we uncover its riches.

## 3. The RICHES of Christian Contentment (v. 12)

CHARGE TO UNBELIEVERS – Matthew 13:44 – JESUS IS THE TREASURE!

Matthew 13:44 ESV "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Paul expands: *"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."*

What a wealth this is! Contentment is an inner treasure—joy and happiness that no circumstance can steal. Paul knows how to handle lows *and* highs: success without pride, trials without despair. He's learned the *secret* (or mystery) of facing it all to God's glory, for the soul's joy, without falling into idolatry.

In the *The Hiding Place* you find the contrast of two sisters – Corrie (the author) and her older sister, Betsy. Betsy is so content. Oh the riches it is for her in the midst of – a concentration camp – her comfort his not touch, her inner happiness and wealth is not disturbed.

As 1 Timothy 6:6, 8 reminds us: "Godliness with contentment is great gain... If we have food and clothing, with these we will be content."

Let me give you an old definition. I would encourage you to write it down:

**"Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, and gracious frame of spirit which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every circumstance."**

Attitude

Upwardly Aligned

All encompassing

Why is this virtue so excellent? Let me share seven excellencies I've gleaned from the Puritans:

1. It gives us greater ability to worship and glorify God in every situation.
2. It allows other virtues to flourish: humility, joy, peace, wisdom, thankfulness.
3. It postures us for more grace—God gives grace to the humble (James 4:6).
4. It readies us for fruitful service; content Christians seize every opportunity to serve the Father.
5. It protects us against temptation in a unique way.
6. It makes us easily comforted by unseen realities—eternal promises over temporary pains.
7. It fills us with hope: a strong, settled assurance that the future is bright because of God's promises.

But beware the opposite—a complaining spirit. It's poisonous! Observe its evils:

1. It's the opposite of praise and worship.
2. It reveals ugliness and corruption in our hearts.
3. It's the mark of an ungodly generation (Romans 1).
4. It's rebellion against God.
5. It's contrary to conversion and Gospel grace.
6. It's unworthy of a child of the King.
7. It forgets our countless blessings.
8. It sets a horrible example.
9. It makes no unbeliever want what we have.

And we make excuses: "I'm not complaining, I'm venting." "God has abandoned me." "You don't know what I've been through." "I never expected this." "You've never experienced anything like it." "I don't deserve this." "I can't help it."

Friends, these are lies. Complaining dishonors God. Contentment honors Him.

#### 4. The SOURCE of Christian Contentment (v. 13)

Finally: *"I can do all things through him who strengthens me."*

My son and I lift weights. We want muscles to be stronger. We have learned that you don't get the muscles you want by without work. We have learned...and to do so you need to work. You need to exercise – face resistance, eat right, get the right rest and sleep, and you need consistency.

We need a strength from Christ this far greater than the muscles that can be built in a gym. We need strength from Christ that is inward that is not natural – and doesn't just immediately get transferred in fullness when we become a Christian.

Paul means Christ. And "all things" is in this context: facing *any* God-ordained circumstance with trust, contentment, and obedience, because Christ strengthens us.

Note three keys:

1. **It's learned.** Paul says, "I have learned... I know how..." He wasn't born content; he was taught through trials. We can learn too—it's a process God works in us.
2. **It's through Christ.** This whole letter points here. In chapter 1, look *up* to Christ's exaltation—life or death, prison or freedom, it's gain if it magnifies Him. In chapter 2, look *down* to Christ's humility—servant-hearted, we embrace losses to live like Him. In chapter 3, look *away* from self-righteousness to Christ's gifted righteousness by faith. No confidence in the flesh; all in Him.
3. **It's divine strength.** The Holy Spirit empowers us. Hebrews 13:5: "Be content... for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'"

This is why we call it *Christian* contentment—not human grit, but from above. Thomas Watson called it "the art of divine contentment." Jeremiah Burroughs defines it perfectly:

*"Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, and gracious frame of spirit which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every circumstance."*

How do we get it? I NEED HIS STRENGTH – I NEED WHAT I DON' HAVE NATURALLY

1. **Recognize it's learned**—a process through trials.
2. **Root it in Christ**—our salvation and His ongoing work. – Roots get down and go low – humble yourself under him!
3. **Follow Paul's gaze**: Up to Christ (ch. 1), down to Christ (ch. 2), away from self to Christ (ch. 3).
4. **Connect it to prayer**: Don't be anxious; pray with thanksgiving, and God's peace guards you (Phil. 4:6-7). Practice what you've learned, and the God of peace is with you (v. 9).

Above all, fix right thoughts about God in your heart. Make good interpretations of His dealings: Lost your job? God is up to something good and wise. Health failing? He knows; He's working for your good (Rom. 8:28).

HIS WISE AND FATHERLY CARE!

Contentment flows from apprehending God's love—believing and resting in His promises. Everything passes through the wall of your Father's wise, fatherly protection. Nothing touches you without His say-so.

## Conclusion

Church, do you want heaven on earth? Shine as lights? Persevere without grumbling? Learn this secret with Paul: *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*

Let's pray: Father, teach us contentment. Strengthen us by Your Spirit. In plenty or need, may we submit and delight in Your ways. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

*This week, when trials come, pause and interpret them through God's fatherly love.*

## APPENDIX

### PHILIPPIANS

Verse	Text	How Paul Illustrates Contentment
1:12–14	"What has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel..."	<b>Prison becomes a pulpit</b> —chains produce courage in others.
1:18–21	"Christ is proclaimed... in that I rejoice... For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."	<b>Death or life, both are gain</b> —contentment makes every outcome joyful.

Verse	Text	How Paul Illustrates Contentment
2:17–18	“Even if I am to be poured out... I am glad and rejoice with you all.”	<b>Sacrificial loss = shared joy</b> —he’s content to be spent for them.
3:7–8	“I count everything as loss... rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.”	<b>Worldly résumé trashed</b> —contentment counts Christ as supreme wealth.
4:4–7	“Rejoice... The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious... peace of God...”	<b>Anxiety replaced by prayer</b> —the mechanism that <i>produces</i> contentment.
4:11–13	“I have learned in whatever situation... through him who strengthens me.”	<b>The explicit textbook case</b> —learned, Christ-powered, all-circumstance contentment.

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## 2 CORINTHIANS (the “thorn” letter)

Verse	Text	How Paul Illustrates Contentment
4:7–10	“We are afflicted... but not crushed... always carrying in the body the death of Jesus...”	<b>Weakness is the container for power</b> —content to be broken so Christ shines.
4:16–18	“Though our outer self is wasting away... this light momentary affliction...”	<b>Eternal perspective trumps pain</b> —contentment fixes eyes on unseen glory.
6:4–10	“As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.”	<b>Paradoxical CV</b> —poverty and sorrow become platforms for joy.
12:7–10	“A thorn... ‘My grace is sufficient... I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses...’”	<b>Thorn + sufficiency = delight</b> —contentment <i>boasts</i> in weakness because Christ’s power rests.

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## 1 TIMOTHY (pastoral charge)

Verse	Text	How Paul Illustrates Contentment
6:6–8	“Godliness with contentment is great gain... if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.”	<b>Minimal externals, maximal gain</b> —contentment redefines “enough.”

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## COLOSSIANS (Christ’s supremacy)

Verse	Text	How Paul Illustrates Contentment
1:24	“I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake...”	<b>Suffering fills up Christ’s afflictions</b> —contentment finds purpose in pain.

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## ROMANS (gospel logic)

Verse	Text	How Paul Illustrates Contentment
8:28, 35–39	“All things work together for good... Who shall separate us...?”	<b>Nothing can touch ultimate good</b> —contentment rests in unbreakable love.