

In verse 10 Paul is basically saying, thank you for helping, but I really was never in need. And that attitude is explained by the next two verses. He knew how to live in God's peace (which he explained comes from prayer, petition and thanksgiving). Paul found contentment in Jesus.

What circumstances did Paul give as examples of situations he was content with (v.12)? Which do you feel is more challenging, being content when you have little, or being content when you have plenty?

So, Paul says the circumstances are not the most important thing in his life. Good or bad, rich or poor, praised or persecuted- that really didn't matter when he had God's joy, peace and contentment.

Philippians 4:13 NLT - 13 For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.

In light of verse 12, what is it Christ strengthens Paul to do? Is he strong enough to break his prison chains and escape from Rome? Or is he strong enough to live in chains facing certain death for his faith? How do you think the verse has been misinterpreted?

WRAP-UP

Paul loved and was grateful to the Philippian church. They were his crown, but he wanted the best for them and that includes unity. Paul urged those in disagreement to be on one mind, the mind of Christ. He also longed for his friends to find the peace and contentment he had in Jesus, through prayer petition and thanksgiving in all situations. Paul found strength to live in any circumstance in Christ.

MEMORY VERSE.

Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have.
- Philippians 4:11 NLT

PRAYER (20 MIN) Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life

Challenge - In your prayer time this week, spend some time simply talking with God before you bring your requests, and be sure to end with a time of thanksgiving.

"An Epistle of Joy"

Prison Letters- #10

INTRODUCTION

As Paul closes out his letter to the church at Philippi, he begins with words of thanks and encouragement to his friends and co-laborers. They are carrying on the work of the Gospel in his absence and they are viewed as both a joy and a reward by Paul. He calls them his "crown" (*stephanos*) which was the prize given to the victors in public games. But along with this praise, Paul also corrects an area causing him distress; division amongst the body. But Paul refocuses the Philippians and us on the eternal, not the temporal circumstances, because in Christ we find joy and peace that surpasses understanding.

Ice Breaker

What rewards or recognitions have you received that were especially memorable or valuable to you?

Key Passage

Philippians 4:4 NLT - 4 Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again--rejoice!

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Unity

Philippians 4:2-3 NLT - 2 Now I appeal to Euodia and Syntyche. Please, because you belong to the Lord, settle your disagreement. 3 And I ask you, my true partner, to help these two women, for they worked hard with me in telling others the Good News. They worked along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are written in the Book of Life.

Now that's embarrassing! Paul is writing to the whole church, but before he signs off, he calls out two women who are in disagreement. It is a

common theme in most of Paul's writing – the importance of unity amongst the body of believers. You will find it in Philippians, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, 1 Thessalonians, and in the letter to all the Hebrews! Be at peace and live in unity with your brothers and sisters.

Based on what Paul says, how would you describe the faith of the women mentioned? If their issue has reached Paul in a Roman prison, do you think it is evident to the others in their church; to those they are telling the Good News to? What ways can such arguments, attitudes and disagreements within the body undermine the witness of the Gospel, or the faith of other Christians? Have you experienced a church division?

Every day we must decide if our rights, or our “wins”, are more important than promoting unity and peace. All Christians won't agree in all areas. But sometimes we draw a dividing line that separates us from other brothers and sisters based on one point or another. There are basics of the faith that cannot be compromised, like the deity of Christ, but others that allow for grace in their application, like which political party we join.

In verse 2 Paul urges them to settle their disagreement, live in harmony or be of the same mind because they are in the Lord, because they belong to Jesus. In verse 5 we find what Paul desires everyone to see when they view the followers of Jesus.

Philippians 4:5 NLT - 5 Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.

Philippians 4:5 NKJV - 5 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord [is] at hand.

Philippians 4:5 CSB - 5 Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

There are variations on the interpretation of this verse in different translations. How would you state the idea Paul wants to emphasize to the church in this verse? Do you feel this applies to the church today? Let God bring to mind an area you might disagree with others in and allow Him to show you how you can still be in harmony, even if you don't agree. Consider where you might encourage others in this way.

2. Joy

Philippians 4:4 NLT - 4 Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again--rejoice!

This is not the first time Paul has urged the Philippians to rejoice. In the previous chapter (3:1) he also told them to rejoice. Not in circumstances, but in the Lord.

This doesn't naturally make sense to us- why would Paul rejoice? He is in prison, possibly about to die. The explanation is found in verses 6-7.

Philippians 4:6-7 NIV - 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Verse 6 begins with “do not be anxious”. Really Paul? Have you seen the news lately? But Paul had seen the news, and he knew how bad things were in his world as he wrote this (remember Emperor Nero was ruling in Rome). But Paul had learned the secret to attaining God's peace. In all situations, prayer, petition, and thanksgiving. Let's consider each.

Prayer- It's easy to skip right to petition when we come to God, but before mentioning petitions or requests, Paul says just talk to God. How do you enter God's presence? How do you address Him and acknowledge who He is? How might you expand that time in communicating with God- by worship, recognizing and naming all the characteristics and titles of God? How about sharing how you feel or what is on your mind with God, even if it isn't part of your requests?

Petition- This is one we probably include every time we pray. But do we merely list our needs? How can we include our heart's desire, our concerns, pain, or fears when we bring our requests to God? Do we pray scripture over our requests when we know what God's Word has to say?

Thanksgiving- Even without receiving the response to our petitions, we have so much to be thankful for. Remember those things when you talk with God and be thankful.

3. Peace, Contentment, and Strength to do What?

Philippians 4:10-12 NLT - 10 How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but you didn't have the chance to help me. 11 Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. 12 I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little.