



November 24, 2021 - Thanksgiving

Philippians 4:11–13 (NIV) 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 all this through him who gives me strength.

Thanksgiving is officially here! School is out for the holiday. We have the food laid up for our feasts tomorrow—just need to do the cooking and the eating. *A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving* was on TV Sunday evening. We're all set, and we're even on board for being thankful. That's what thanksgiving is all about, isn't it? Being thankful. Do you know what I'm really thankful for? My chair. That might sound funny, but there's no better place to be on Thanksgiving afternoon and evening. A tummy full of food...football on the TV...a little nap time. That chair is looking better and better. I'm really content when I'm sitting in that chair. Content, and thankful.

How long does that kind of contentment last? A few hours? The rest of the day? If it's that difficult to be content for such a short period of time, how can Paul say, "**I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances**" (Philippians 4:11 NIV)? I think it's easy to be content on Thanksgiving Day when I'm full of food and I have what I want. It's when life isn't going so well that we struggle with being content. How did Paul do it? When he wrote these words, he was in the city of Rome. He had been arrested for preaching the good news about Jesus. How

unfair! Paul had to deal with even worse situations. In 2 Corinthians 11 he offered a list of everything that had happened to him during his time as a missionary. He had been beaten publicly 5 times, stoned and left for dead, shipwrecked 3 times, in danger of attack wherever he went, worked hard without much sleep, often went without food, knew what it was like to be cold and naked. How could Paul possibly “**Be content whatever the circumstances**”?

I struggle with that because I am not a very content person. Maybe you can commiserate with me! Let’s walk through a typical day for your average everyday person. I wake up in the morning and face another day, virtually identical to every other day. Gotta get up. Gotta get dressed. Gotta go to school or work. Gotta stay home and deal with this place.

I sit down for breakfast and it’s the same old meal, and even worse because now I can’t eat my favorite breakfast junk food anymore.

I have to drop off the kids for school, and it’s just as chaotic today as it was yesterday. The kids are noisy and obnoxious. They ignore my pleas for a calm, quiet ride to school. One of them is complaining that they had too much homework and didn’t get an assignment done. The other hands me a field trip slip that needed to be paid for and handed in yesterday.

I arrive at work, and it’s another day of struggling to meet deadlines, dealing with customer complaints, and the never ending issues with my co-workers who aren’t team players.

On the way home I drive past the cemetery. Some days it’s almost enough to draw tears when I think about the person I can’t talk to any more because they are in heaven.

I get home and I’m tired, cranky, hungry, and exhausted, and I know I’m going to have to get up and do it all over again tomorrow. I’m not content, and I’m certainly not very thankful. How can God expect me to be content in every situation and be “**give thanks in all circumstances**” (1 Thessalonians 5:18 NIV84)? If only I had more money—I wouldn’t have to work so hard. I could take time off and be with my family or my friends. My schedule would be easier, and it wouldn’t have to look the same day after day after day after day. Then I would be content. But I’m not because I don’t have what I want, and God didn’t give it to me. Ah, there’s the real problem with my lack of contentment and thankfulness. I blame God because I don’t have what I want. I don’t like his promise to give me what I need. I have focused my faith and trust right here—on me! I know what’s best for me. I know what I need, and God isn’t giving it. Like a surly child I tell him, “You are so mean! I hate you! I never want to see you again!”

How can I learn to be content with what I have? Paul shared the secret of contentment with us, and it turns out it’s not such a big secret. He wrote, “**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. I can do all this through him who gives me strength**” (Philippians 4:12–13 NIV). Paul didn’t say, “I’m going to work hard to be more content.” Or, “I’m going to come up with a ‘thankful schedule’ so I give thanks in all circumstances.” Paul took us back to Jesus.

Jesus is the secret to our contentment. He understands what a tough life is all about. Jesus knew what it meant to be persecuted, hungry, thirsty, and in need of food and clothing. Jesus also knew what it meant to be arrested, thrown in prison, beaten, mocked, and sentenced to

death. Jesus wasn't stoned. He was crucified—executed like a common criminal, pinned to the cross with thieves and murderers. Jesus lived through all of that and didn't have anyone who could help him carry that load. He didn't have crowds demonstrating before Pilate because of the injustice of it all—in fact, the crowds called for his execution. Jesus' friends deserted him and ran away. His enemies spoke hatefully to him as he hung on the cross. Even Jesus' own Father turned his back on him. Why did Jesus endure all of this? For Paul. For you. For me. He endured everything that could bring discontent and thanklessness into our lives. He paid the ultimate price for all of it—his own life! Jesus did it all and was content, not because his life was perfect and free from trouble, but because he trusted his Father's plan to save the world and he loved us enough to carry it out. That brought him the contentment Solomon wrote about: **“The fear of the LORD leads to life; then one rests content, untouched by trouble”** (Proverbs 19:23 NIV).

That's where Paul found contentment—in Jesus. Jesus—the risen Savior who confronted Paul on the road to Damascus and called him to faith... Jesus—who brought new life into Paul's heart through the gift of baptism... Jesus, who directed Paul to preach the good news to the whole world, both to the Jews and non-Jews... Jesus gave Paul the strength to be content and thankful in every situation, no matter what the circumstances.

Jesus is our Savior. Jesus went through all those things for us, too. Jesus gives us the strength to be content and thankful no matter what. He invites us to come to him, to sit down and find in him everything that we need. I brought a chair up here today to help us visualize this contentment that Jesus gives.

When you wake up in the morning, pull out your contentment chair and have a seat. Jesus has blessed you with another morning with your eyes open, your lungs breathing in and out, and your heart pumping. Take a moment to be thankful and content for another day of his grace! **“I can do all this through him who gives me strength”** (Philippians 4:12–13 NIV).

When you sit down at the breakfast table, have a seat in your contentment chair and take a moment to thank God for the food that nourishes and sustains these bodies, and for the opportunity to look around the table and see the people that we love. Content. Thankful. **“I can do all this through him who gives me strength”** (Philippians 4:12–13 NIV).

On the way to school, pull out the contentment chair and see the vehicle filled with noisy people in a different way—vibrant individuals, uniquely made by their Creator, with all kinds of gifts and skills. Thank Jesus for the privilege of being with them, teaching them, and loving them. Content. Thankful. **“I can do all this through him who gives me strength”** (Philippians 4:12–13 NIV).

At work, pull out the contentment chair and have a seat. When the customer complaints come fast and furious, and the workplace stresses threaten to overwhelm, find a moment of contentment and strength knowing that Jesus gave this job to you as a gift and trusts you to do your best with your abilities. Thank him that you have a job, can earn a living, and take care of yourself and your family. Content. Thankful. **“I can do all this through him who gives me strength”** (Philippians 4:12–13 NIV).

When you stop by the cemetery and look at the headstone with tears in your eyes, pull out the contentment chair and sit a spell. Let the tears come, thankful for the years you had with them, the wonderful memories that still replay vividly in your head, and the comfort that you'll see them again in heaven. Content. Thankful. **"I can do all this through him who gives me strength"** (Philippians 4:12–13 NIV).

When it's bedtime, sit down in the contentment chair one more time. Tell Jesus that you're tired and cranky. Then, thank him for another day's work. Remember that you're tired because he blessed you with whatever job you do, and you've been able to work for him one more day. Content. Thankful. **"I can do all this through him who gives me strength"** (Philippians 4:12–13 NIV).

A Thanksgiving feast and my favorite chair bring contentment, but it won't last very long. Real contentment can only come from one place—our Savior Jesus. Paul learned that secret, and he shared it with us. When we struggle with contentment, when we aren't feeling very thankful, we can go back to the cross and pull out our contentment chair. Sit down. Look up at the rough, blood-stained wood. See the pain, the anguish, and even better, the love on Jesus' face. Scoot your chair over to the cemetery just on the other side of the hill. Look at the tomb—stone rolled away, empty. Jesus isn't there. He's alive! Through his death and resurrection, Jesus has given us every reason to be content and thankful. **"I can do all this through him who gives me strength"** (Philippians 4:12–13 NIV). I pray that Jesus' strength will fill your Thanksgiving celebration with contentment and thankfulness today and always! Amen.

To God alone the glory! Pastor Jon Brohn