

Good morning we're coming to the end of our series looking at Paul's letter to the Philippians. And today we reach its conclusion.

In this final passage Paul talks about the secret to a contented and fulfilled life –

A contented and fulfilled life – here are a couple of images... ☺

to be honest we could all do with some of that.

We are all looking for contentment, fulfilment in life.

The problem IS that we live in a society built on encouraging us NOT to be content.

*We don't need an iPod, you **need** an iPod2, and soon we'll need an iPod3,*

We don't need a TV - we need a Flat Screen 164 inch, LED, 3D HD HDD TV –

We don't need just one pair of shoes we need 64 pairs of Jimmy Choo shoes.

We don't need that dress - its so "last year" we need this new dress which seems to me to be exactly the same design my mum bought 40 years ago.

There is always something new, something better, something more being offered to satisfy our search for contentment.

People are dissatisfied:

Dissatisfied with their sex life, dissatisfied their body shape, dissatisfied with their family, with themselves

No wonder Counselling has exploded!

We are not content with who we are, or what we have or with what life is giving us...

Yet Paul said "I have found the secret to that contentment and fulfilment!"

And given that Paul is under arrest, in ill health and facing execution!

That's pretty remarkable!

Given his freedom has gone, his health is going and his life can be measured in months!

How can he say

v11 **"I am not ... need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances."**!

I have found the secret of being content,

I have found a gyroscope in my life,

I have found this deep equilibrium.

Whatever happens!

v12 **"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."

In good times and bad times, I have this rock, this stability, this inner peace.

And its not just Paul, Christian's have experienced the same down through the ages:

In 1555, Bishops Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer were burnt at the stake.

Just before they were tied up Ridley embraced Latimer and said 'Be of good heart, brother, for God will either assuage the flames or else strengthen us to abide it.'

And as they were tied up Latimer said 'Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man. For we shall this day light such a candle (by God's grace in England) as I trust shall never be put out.'

Be of good heart!? be comforted!?

How can anyone talk like that, at a time like that...!

I have found the secret of being content – even when I am going to die in pain??!!

The truth is this. Paul's words are not just for saints, for mystics who have spent 30 years sitting on a pole, or for black-belt 3rd Dan Christian's
It's for people like you and me

So I want to talk about this secret
where NOT to look for it
where to find it; and
how to live it.

where not to look, where to find, how to live **the secret of contentment**.

1. Firstly, where NOT to look

v12 "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation"

It's a Secret
secrets are things that not everybody knows
they are things that not everybody finds
they are, by definition, not easy or obvious to discover.
That's people's experience of Contentment

Not everybody finds it but everybody IS looking for it.
Prince Charles said

"There remains deep in the soul, if I dare use that word, a persistent and unconscious anxiety that something is missing, some ingredient that makes life worth living".
Something is missing!

Have you ever worried about something missing that's really important to you?
Has something ever happened to churn you up inside?

*There is this hollow feeling...
And then you get distracted for a moment and life carries on,
And the hollowness fades – but its still there!
you're still feeling anxious, but for a moment you can't remember why –
And then you DO remember – "oh yeah, that right, that's gone"*

Well, in our life, for large swathes of time we CAN BE distracted –
but then we can "catch ourselves" and we realise that something deep IS missing! Something that makes life worth living.

Sometimes we get a hint of what that is
when we meet a new friend, or when we fall in love.
Or when we go on holiday, or
when we get a promotion, or
when we buy a new handbag

We feel we're on the verge of getting what we're looking for
and for a time it seems to satisfy but not for long,
we seem to be on the verge of getting it – but it seems just beyond us

Mark Twain said,
"I am not sure what it is that I want, but I want it so badly my heart aches to have it".

The problem is that nothing in this world can deliver what we're looking for,
for everything in this world is too small, too fragile, too transient
everything that we put our trust in, in this world will turn to dust
everything in this world will fail us
for nothing can bear up under the tremendous weight of responsibility for all our expectations.
Nothing lasts.

if we build our lives on our business.
What happens if our business goes down the tubes?
If we build it on reputation –
What happens when the truth of who we are is discovered?
If we build our life on relationships,
what happens when that relationship ends up being less than ideal?
If we build our life on our family
what happens if that family breaks?

We can distract ourselves – but when the distraction itself fails? –
what then?

we are perishable beings looking for a foundation that is imperishable
we are mortal looking for something that will last forever
we are fallible looking for something infallible

the American poet, Wallace Stevens, said
*“even in contentment. I feel the need for some **imperishable** bliss”*

*He said, “whenever I find a **perishable** bliss, like a good job or a great meal or a beautiful boat ride or a
marvellous panorama,
even when I'm sitting back in contentment
I realise that this is stimulating in me, an appetite that will be hungry again”.*

Even in contentment, I feel the need for something, imperishable

There is a deep longing in all our hearts that nothing finite can satisfy.
All thoughtful people - whether they are Christians or not agree
that there is a longing for something beautiful something deeply fulfilling, something that will satisfy,
but its an elusive secret

We detect it, but can't quite put our finger on it
We can distract ourselves – but it does not satisfy

CS Lewis said,
if you are hungry, then there is food.
If you're a baby duckling longing to swim then there is water.
*So if there are desires within us that nothing on earth can fulfil, then it stands to reason that we are made for
something more.*

Satisfaction is not found in anything of this earth
Soul deep satisfaction is not found in anything perishable, fallible, transient
The secret is this: we are made for so much more...

And until we realise we are INCAPABLE of contentment we shall never be capable of it – that's the secret

until we realise we are INCAPABLE of contentment (there is nothing we can do, nothing we can find on earth that satisfies the eternal within us) we shall never be capable of finding it
For we shall always be looking in the wrong place
That's the secret – firstly, don't look here.

2. So Secondly, Look Somewhere else!

Paul says situations come and go

v12 “I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation”

Situations are not where contentment is to be found

it's not in a good job, or a good house, or a good family,

or anything good we can name

Its not about situations

I have learned the secret of being content in ANY situation... for

v13 “I can do everything through **him** who gives me strength”

What Paul is saying is that contentment is found

not in a situation but in a relationship.

Not in a “thing” but in a “him”

I guess this is obvious.

When a good thing happens to us – we look for someone to share it with.

The thing itself is not enough we need to find someone to share it with!

when young people get their GCSE results they celebrate together.

You see those film clips on local news of Young People all dancing up and down together screaming in such a high pitch that dogs 5 blocks away cover their ears!

when a good things happens we want to share it with our friends,

we want to share it with someone **who loves us**.

Why? Because it makes the thing even more fulfilling!

On the other hand - if we have great news and we have **no-one** to share it with it makes us sad!

The good thing itself can be diminished or multiplied by the people around us!

it works the other way around too.

When something really bad happens to us (when a bad things happens)

we look for someone to share that with too.

we look for people who will listen

who will feel it

who will understand

when we are in trouble and it looks like it can't get any worse

we look for

someone who is capable of being alongside us, who “gets it”, who loves us.

Why? because it helps us find comfort in the darkness.

What Paul is saying is that contentment is not found in a “thing”, “in a situation” it is found in a relationship.

And there is no more profound a relationship that the one we can have with God
Because
he is the one that made us and therefore understands us
he is the one has invested himself in us
he is the one that has experienced life in all its joy and pain like us
he is the one “who gets it – who ‘gets’ what it is like to be “us”
he is the one who bears the burden
he is the one who loves us

And he is the one – that multiples our joys and bears our sorrows *whatever the circumstances*.

He is the one who says “it will be OK”
When our friends say that it is just a wishful expression of hope on their part.
They don’t know
They have no power to rescue the situation!

But when God says “it will be OK”, you are OK, you will be OK”
that is a rock solid promise!

Paul says

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I am convinced!

He is convinced not only from the years of sharing his joys and troubles with Jesus
he is convinced that this Jesus has power over death and eternity!
And therefore his future is secure

And therefore if “anxiety” is (as David said last week) caused by taking tomorrows worries and experiencing them today
Then contentment is taking tomorrows hope and enjoying it now!

So if you are looking for contentment
stop looking at your circumstances – it is never found their
it is not IN your freedom, health, possessions, life-span
it is found in Christ.

The fact that he loves you
The fact that he gets it,
The fact that he will hold you safe through all eternity
This is the secret.

And as that relationship grows
so does the depth of that fulfilment

The trouble is this –
What we know in our heads is so often far removed from what we feel in our hearts
The theory (that we know and believe and are committed too) can be miles away from our experience

3. So thirdly, how do we live what we have found?

3.1 Firstly, we need to Reset our Expectations.

Expectations more than anything else govern our **feelings**.

Look if it's my 50th Birthday and I am expecting a card and £50 from my Dad – even though I know, for example, that times are tough for him if I am expecting a card and £50 from my Dad for my 50th Birthday and he gives me a card and £20.

If I was hoping for 50 then I am disappointed –

I think perhaps he doesn't care as much as I'd want him too.

I am pleased about the £20 (hey I'm not saying its not useful) but somehow even IN the receipt of that present my happiness is tinged with disappointment.

Even a blessing can become a sadness because of my expectations.

*If, on the other hand, I was hoping for a card from my Dad (and because I know times are tough, I was hoping for **just a card**)*

And if I get a card and a £20 note drops out from it then I am more than pleased.

I was hoping that he would simply remember, but now (despite times being hard) I also see that he has given me a gift as well!

now my happiness is **compounded** by my expectations.

Same card, same gift, same circumstances –

completely different feelings.

do you see expectations *more than anything else* govern our feelings.

God has never said that he will spare us from the reality of the brokenness of this world.

We are not protected FROM all circumstances

but we can be given strength IN all circumstances.

Yet I find, time and time again,

that we Christian's are disappointed with God

because we expect our life to go better!

Paul could have said

God why am I in prison – I used to do so much good work for you,

God why is my health breaking – I am more useful to you well,

God why am I facing death when I have been so faithful to you.

Yet he doesn't.

He doesn't because he is not disappointed in God

because his expectations have never been that life was going to be easy or without trouble.

Indeed one chapter earlier in Philippians 3:10, he says

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings.

What does that mean?

It means if Jesus didn't have a home, if Jesus didn't have a family, if Jesus didn't live a long life, if Jesus (supremely loved by his Father) didn't have stuff and

through it HE pointed people to God,

then I will do too.

Expectations more than anything else govern our feelings.

Firstly, don't expect God to protected us FROM all circumstances

do expect him to give us strength IN all circumstances

3.2 Secondly, Get involved in ministry.

Paul is actually modelling what we need to do.

In the mist of his suffering, in prison, between guards
dog tired and in ill health
he is ministering to the Philippians.

He has not retired injured,
he is not all self-absorbed in his own problems,
he is ministering through them
In them, **through** them, **out** of them.
and **because of them** we have one of the finest pieces of practical theological writing ever written.

Paul is modelling it. He is showing us what to do
to find contentment and fulfilment.
→ get involved in ministry.

And he is thanking for doing the same.
He says
v14 “it was good of you to share in my troubles”

You guys, you are a young church, a small church, a new church and yet despite all your own limitations, you shared in **my troubles**.

Not every church “gets this” not everyone wants to share in ministry.
v15 ... *as you know not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only*
And therefore not every church received the encouragement of Paul’s letter to the Philippians.
This church invested itself sacrificially in supporting ministry.
v16 *for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need.*
This Philippian Church lived what it believed

Look, we are a small congregation.
We are a new congregation.
Fragile, not fully formed,
Yet God calls us to be involved in ministry
Because where our treasure is there our heart is also
When we invest ourselves in eternity God blesses us with eternity.

Paul said their investment
v17 ...*was credited to their account.*
it is
v18 ... *a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.*

Ultimate fulfilment is not found in anything of this earth
Soul deep satisfaction is not found in anything perishable

We are investing in something imperishable
we are supporting something that will last forever
we are deepen our friendship with God

And therefore as we give ourselves, as we invest our time, our talent, our treasure
as each of us gets involved in ministry so

we find soul deep fulfilment and contentment.
we are living what we have found.

Reset our expectations
Get involved in Ministry

3.3 And thirdly Trust God.

Trust him with your time,
Trust with your money
Trust him with your life; and

v19 "And my God will supply all your needs, according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus"

He will not leave you high and dry
"my" God – the God I know, (says Paul), the God of my experience,
the one with whom I have shared my eventful life
"will never short-change you.

God is no-one debtor.
What you give to him you will never lose.
he will never forget
He will always bless.

Reset our expectations
Get involved in Ministry

- ask David if there are any roles that you can do to support this service especially after the summer when we try to go to every week.

- at the back there, there are Standing Order Forms, Gift Aid forms to allow you to literally invest in this ministry and make a difference in people's lives forever

Get involved in Ministry

and Trust God.

Amanda and I occasionally watch a TV programme
its always ends the same way
two men sitting out on a balcony at the end of a hard working day,
looking back over what has happened ,
chatting together,
totally comfortable with each other,
sharing a drink and smoking a cigar.
It is a picture of contentment
Two friends looking back on the cut and thrust of the day.

We can do that with God every day of our life
We will do that in eternity

two friends, looking out across eternity
at the end of our life,

looking back on what has happened ,
chatting together,

totally comfortable with each other,
sharing a drink and if not a cigar.

TOTAL CONTENTMENT AND SATISFACTION.

That was Paul's hope,
That is every Christian's hope

It is our experience.
I pray it may be yours too.