

1 Thessalonians 5:18

Give thanks (express gratitude) in (during) all circumstances; for this is the will (purpose) of God in Christ Jesus for you.

If I asked how many of us are thankful this morning, most of us would raise our hands. But if I asked how many of us are content... well, I may get a different response, I mean aren't they two different things? I'm going to strongly suggest that a content heart is a thankful heart, a heart FULL of gratitude for all God has done.

One of the difficulties of being thankful... of being grateful, of trying to be consistently and purposefully walking in gratitude is a memory issue.

We forget so easily... we lose sight of God's faithfulness and all His blessings towards us. Instead, we recall (interesting word isn't it?) our past... we call back memories of so many past negative events and give them far too much airtime in our heads. I believe we can choose to recall the powerful moments of God's faithfulness... by the way we remember what God has brought us through.

One of the **old English meaning of the word THANKS** is wonderful... **I will remember what you have done for me.** How we exercise our memories can help us remember things to be thankful for. **Gratitude is the memory muscle of the heart.**

Let's pray....

Please go to the book of Philippians... how many of you like getting thank you notes or letters?

The Apostle Paul is writing a deeply personal thank you letter to the church in Philippi. This is also a letter on unity but he is reminding them that, although he is in prison, there is so much to be thankful for. This is one of the four letters Paul writes from prison (Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon)... there is some debate where this prison is but most scholars believe Paul is under house arrest in Rome, not the prison nicknamed "The House of Darkness" (also in Rome) where he was when he died.

However, this was no cakewalk for Paul... he was under constant guard, shackled to his captors. These were soldiers of the imperial guard... the emperor's guard, the best of the best... who found themselves in four-hour shifts, chained to the Apostle Paul. Makes you wonder who was chained to who? **(handcuff someone to me)**

Imagine being chained to someone...24 hours a day! Sleeping, eating, visiting, bathing... every moment, every movement shackled to someone. For about 2 years... this was Paul's state.

And yet we read... Philippians 4:11-12

*“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.**”*

Perhaps we need to define the word content first... the dictionary describes contentment... to be a **state of peaceful happiness and satisfaction** (probably not the state of NY) but the Greek word here means... *sufficient, strong enough to not need aid.*

In this way, contentment is an inner sense of peace knowing God is in control... which gives me the power to walk in faith and in worship.

The first thing I notice here is powerful... Paul says he has **LEARNED** to be content. Paul had to be taught! We learn contentment. We don't just snap our fingers in tough times and say, “Ok. I'm satisfied now.” We learn this deep satisfaction... by going through stuff.

Greek for the word Learn = initiate, to make an intimate acquaintance with, step into the mystery.

Throughout this books are the words... in Christ, through Christ, with Christ, gain Christ and for Christ... contentment has everything to do with relationship!

Paul learned a secret about contentedness, how it's tied to gratitude... even though he was shackled and under arrest... awaiting a sentence from an unjust system. He learned a powerful way to not just deal with it but rejoice through it.

16 times throughout Philippians he mentions joy, rejoicing... here is a man who is thank-FULL with his relationship with God and his brothers and sister!

So what was his main secret?

(13) I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

Paul is saying chains don't define me... it's not the prison, it's not the season, not the condition I find myself in, it's not the situation, not my lack, not my loss, not my confinement that defines my thankfulness, my contentment.

I can do all things... through Christ, in Christ, for Christ... I've learned, I've remembered what I've been taught and I've stepped into this mystery of trusting God and rejoicing whatever state I find myself in.

This is radical gratitude... Paul learned this... we need to learn this. Here are some lessons...

Lesson 1

My gratitude is not based on what I have in my life but who I have in my life.

Verses 8

*"Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may **gain (win)** Christ."*

Lesson 2 – Verse 12

It's not my processions or my position that define my contentment. It's the person of Jesus... He's the key to contentment in all things... because we are His procession!

"Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own."

Own = to take eagerly, that is, seize, possess, find

Lesson 3 – Verses 8-9

Contentment is not based on external things but on eternal things. So my lack doesn't decrease my value and my abundance doesn't bring joy... what I practice in my life with Jesus does.

*"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (9) What you **have learned and received and heard** and seen in me—practice these things, and the **God of peace** will be with you."*

Lesson 4 - Philippians 4:6-7

A grateful, content heart is a secure heart. – Philippians 4:6-7

*"Do not be **anxious (troubled, worried)** about anything, but in everything by **prayer (worship words)** and supplication with **thanksgiving (grateful language)** let your requests be made known to God. (7) And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will **guard (hem in, protect with a garrison)** your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*

This verse talks about cultivating an attitude, a lifestyle of thankfulness... with prayer and worship. His peace makes our hearts secure, His presences makes our heart joyful, His giving heart teaches ours to do the same and ALL of that secures our hearts...that is power... that is freedom!