

Phil 4:10-13 #2

Release

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Rod and I talked mid-week and we realized that there is no way for us to have the same sermon! I do recommend that you listen to Rod's sermon on this topic from this morning.

I invite you to listen to the Holy Spirit: I believe God has called us into this conversation about contentment. Daniel prepared a sermon on this topic last fall on Phil 4:12-13. Paul had learned the secret of contentment! Because he learned it, Paul tells us that this is also something we can practice and walk into it.



What is the difference between contentment and complacency: Hustling and working hard so we can rest! We want the best self-care: this is a value in our society. However, **contentment** is not **complacency**. In fact, I see the heart of **discontentment** start early in the Bible on p. 3. Eve has nothing to be discontent about in the garden yet the serpent whispers a lie to her: "*surely you won't die; God is not telling you everything.*" He questioned

God's goodness and this has traveled throughout generations.

Contentment:

A deep spiritual stability
that comes from trusting in God

This is the definition that Eric gave us last week: Our ability to trust God brings a deep spiritual stability not only to us but to those around us.



**Complaint
leads to death**

Complaint leads to death. I tell my husband my thumb hurts and he tells me to go to the doctor. I cannot find the pickles at the grocery store: I complain. But when we are set on complaining—whether complaining about the same thing over and over or

complaining a little in everything we say—we develop a deep bitterness that is under everything. This road leads to death.

Who is content in this story and who is discontent and what happens to both of them? God has brought these people out of slavery in Exodus 15 and then the whole nation walked through a dry waterbed while they watched their enemies get washed away. They proclaim their faith that God will provide. Yet a chapter later, we find this:

Ex 16:1-3

The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”

Exodus 16:3

1The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. **2** In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. **3** The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”

So quickly they went from a total miracle to disbelief. Notice how the narrative has shifted from God’s goodness and care to “God is not here”: Moses and Aaron have brought them to this place. They are believing something false which leads to death in their community. How long did this take?

6 weeks

How long does it take you to go from hearing the voice of God clearly and knowing what to do to feeling like God is not interested? It also happens with our stuff: we get a fancy new phone only to find out they released the next model. With a new car, it only takes 6 minutes for it to become a used car! We save up our money to buy something that we think we really want...until we get it. We think we have married the perfect person...until 6 weeks later we wonder if maybe there was someone better. It takes 6 weeks.



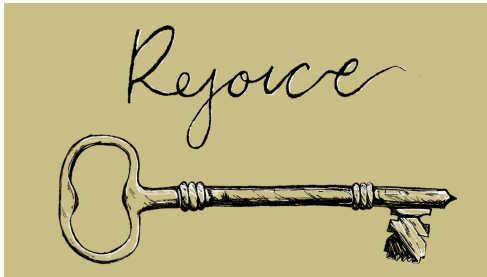
Contentment
leads to life

We must build muscles of contentment: I truly believe contentment has much to do with a road that leads to the very heart of God: Life comes from the Creator and he always moves us toward life. Contentment invites us on this path.

Phi 2:14-16

14 Do everything without grumbling or arguing, **15** so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.”[a] Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky **16** as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain.

This is Paul’s way of saying to do everything *without discontentment*. This is so we can hold forth the word of LIFE.



Eric talked about *rejoicing* last week: Rejoicing actually positions us to be able to step into the next part of the process which is *releasing*.



When my daughter was little, she had a stuffed animal named Pinky from a McD’s Happy Meal. She also had a rubber ducky named Ducky. She would hold both of them in her hands all day. When she had to pick up her room, she would do it with her elbows so she could keep holding onto Pinky and Ducky. She was really good at this and I assert that we are all good at this! When we go through life with things we are holding onto

tightly, we live by our elbows. Release is something that is so simple yet so difficult: in a fallen world, we’re wired to live with our fists tight. God invites us to let go of some of our deepest longings.

Release:

The act of changing your narrative by telling God what you desire and waiting on Him



This has to do with the story we are telling ourselves and with the prayerful conversation with God of what we are longing for and listening to his response. The process of contentment opens the door to GOD’s intended future for us: he has something really good for us! To rejoice is to unlock the door (with our

Rejoice Unlocks the door
(Make much of Jesus)
Release Opens the door

Respond Goes through the door

elbows). We are saying that God is good and abundant. To release opens the door. To respond is to go through the door into GOD's future for us.

I'd like to establish this from Philippians 4:

Release

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Philippians 4:6

Letting our gentleness be evident to all is an important part of contentment: If we are trusting and following Jesus, we don't have to manipulate, elbow people out the way to get what we want. WE can calm down and be gentle. This is the beginning of the new narrative.

Rejoice

Rejoice in the Lord always.
I will say it again: Rejoice!
Let your gentleness be evident to all.
The Lord is near.

Philippians 4:4-5

This is how to release: this invitation is always there. God is never too busy. We can present with an open hand our requests.

Respond

And the peace of God,
which transcends all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds
in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:7

As Eric read earlier, we can do things with our minds and our actions as a response.

Jesus shows us the way

Pray:

- Relationship
- Desires
- Acceptance

Practical ways to release and examples of this in the Bible:

Jesus is in a life/death situation and he has deep desires and emotions. It's OK to have these: contentment doesn't negate having things. We can express these to God and accept what God wants to do moving forward.

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

Matthew 26:39

This is a deeply emotional moment! Notice he acknowledges who God is: "My Father." He asks for the cup to be removed: this is what he wants. He doesn't want to do it but he opens his hand and accepts the Father's will. He prays this three times, not casually repeating it but sweating blood. It is a journey, a process that ends when people come to get him, which is his answer: God is calling him towards life for ourselves and others.

Prayer of Contentment

- 1) Tell God what you know about Him
- 2) Tell God what you long for
- 3) Listen and respond

For me, after Eric preached Daniel's sermon, I would take prayer walks when I was feeling wound up about something. I would go through the process of a prayer of contentment and start with rejoicing. Typically, I would want to start with the problem but it turns out the best place is to start with rejoicing. Praising God by telling him he has the resources and love and care for all the people involved in my situation. Then I would tell God what I longed for and then ask him to intervene, which is the release part.

Then I would listen for God's response. If I had a clear sense of what I needed to do, then I would respond by what I would do. This was my process.

You could also take Rejoice, Release, Respond and walk through it or you could just follow Jesus into the Garden of Gethsemane and pray a prayer of release in the dark, deep places over and over again. They are both ways to step into contentment through prayer.

Paul shows us the way

Rewrite the Narrative:

- Old (false beliefs)
- New (proclaiming truth)

Paul often rewrites narratives in his letters: he takes an old narrative from the culture or from people or from his old beliefs and then he presents the new narrative:

Here is an example of this:

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.... I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

Philippians 1:21, 23-24

There are several layers of the old narrative: Paul is in prison and waiting to hear if he will be released. He could present this narrative first: everyone is out to get me. But he starts with “to die would be better.” He’s not afraid of the possibility of execution because he knows to die is Christ. In this little sliver, the old narrative is “I’d a little bit rather die,” but he also admits that it’s better for him to remain. The new narrative is “I think I’m going to live through this and if Jesus gives this to me, I will live into it to be poured out to bring life into the world.”

Narrative Rewrite

- 1) Write your negative narrative
Write supporting details
Include false beliefs
- 2) Write a better sentence
Write supporting details
Include true beliefs

I started doing this practice I call Narrative Rewrite at the beginning of this year. Changing narratives is difficult for me. Some people can do it in their heads but I need to write it down in a journal. I find a negative narrative that is bouncing around in my head and I write it down in a single sentence. Mine are usually pretty short: ***I can't! This is hard! They hate me!***

It doesn't have to be true, it just has to be negative. Then I write all the support I have for this. It will probably have false beliefs about me, others, and God. I just do bullet points.

Then I ask Jesus for a BETTER narrative (not the right or perfect narrative) and include the supporting details for this narrative. Sometimes I write the support before I write the new narrative. I might carry it physically around all day and tell others about it and make decisions with it in mind.

My Negative Narrative

"I don't wanna."

- Nothing good will happen
- I have nothing to offer
- This is taking prime real estate in my week
- I get emotional and sometimes undermine the work unintentionally

An example of this is me going to a meeting and...

Notice the supporting sentences mostly start with “I.”

My New Narrative

"I will show up and trust Jesus to do the work."

- Jesus wants to do something good here
- Jesus is at work to soften hearts and heal
- Jesus has called me to this
- The people involved are worth the time
- My emotions may help the process along

Here is my new narrative:

Notice the new supporting details! Notice that the subpoints are focused on Jesus.

In some ways, the new narrative questions the old narrative. Are the subpoints true or false? What matters most is that Jesus invited me into the meeting and I will show up.



Complaint tells us we're at the doorway to life

- jealousy
- unforgiveness
- grief
- anxiety

Complaints can also be helpful because they point us to the door in front of us. As I live in community with you, I know we all face difficulties, grievances, anxiety, and relationship challenges. But when we hear the repeated complaining and bitterness and arguments, they show us we are standing at a doorway that leads to life. Eric pointed

out this is a mixed metaphor, but stay with me.



We have a road leading to a wide gate of death and a road leading to life. We could choose either one: head down the path of complaint where we are powerless and victims. But we have the option of stepping into contentment. Complaint tells us we are at the door: we can find it in places where we are jealous or unforgiving...there is an invitation to find us what God is equipping us for and find life. In the anxious places or in the grieving places, we can get stuck and fall into deep despair, but even in these places there is an invitation to walk into contentment that leads to life. I know unforgiveness, grief, anxiety, etc. are difficult places. This isn't a quick and easy fix: it might be like Jesus in the garden, which is an arduous path in the prayer of contentment that is daily and requires the support of others. Even so, it is a good place and God wants to give you himself in the midst of it and that is where life is.

I would like to hear what the Holy Spirit is stirring in you.