



MOMENTS TO PONDER  
UNVEILING JOY:  
EXPLORING THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

Episode 95:

Hi Friends! Welcome to Moments to Ponder. This is a podcast designed to help you spend a few moments in God's Word wherever you are and take away something to ponder.

We live in a loud, busy world that can make it hard to find the time to get into God's word and I'm grateful for these moments we have to ponder the book of Philippians in the series that I've titled, Unveiling Joy. I'm Betsy Marvin and this is episode 95.

(music fades)

It's the first full week of December as this episode goes live, the season of asking Santa for what you want, for making a list and checking it twice, of "all I want for Christmas, is you". I feel like it's the season where you are totally allowed to ask for the fun, frivolous item you want as well as the other thing you actually need – and that is totally ok.

How would you answer the question, what do you want?

Recently, a friend bluntly asked me, What do you want? She wasn't talking about Christmas presents, she meant – at this point in life, what do I want?

I didn't have an answer.

Without going into it too far, my brain is wired to think outwardly. I don't focus inward easily. Meaning, in most situations, I'm processing what's happening around me, not within me. My friend knows this, which is why she pushes me and asks the hard questions.

I continue the process the answer to her question and the verses from this week spoke into it, and I hope they do for you as well.

We begin with verse 10 in Chapter 4:

*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.*

*Phil. 4:10*

Paul again thanks his friends for their help and concern as he begins the conclusion of his letter, praising God for the church in Philippi. They had sent EpAphrOditus over 745 miles to Rome to bring their gifts and Paul is so grateful that they have been ever faithful in their support.

He goes on in verse 11:

*Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. 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. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. Even so, you have done well to share with me in my present difficulty.*

*Phil. 4:11-14*

“Not that I was ever in need” – what a statement. He is waiting in prison because of a corrupt emperor facing possible death and yet he uses the word content. He seems to contradict himself, we know that Paul had needs. So, he expresses his thanks but at the same time he doesn't want to give the impression that Jesus isn't enough for he every need. He has something more to teach them.

Earlier in this chapter, Paul said to them, don't worry about anything, but in everything with prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God that passes human understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

When we look at the whole chapter and put this together, Paul is saying that he has a peace beyond understanding, contentment, because he learned the secret of living in every situation – strength in Jesus. Paul truly lived into this foundation – Jesus is enough.

The word for content in the Greek is autarkes (ow-tar'-kAce) which means; sufficient to self, to be independent of circumstances and people. Paul uses this word purposefully here. In his day, the Stoics were a religious sect that taught

self-sufficiency above all, no need for others, all that matters is self. Paul is saying here – I have learned that all I need is Jesus.

In 2 Corinthians 12:9 writes of learning this as the Lord says to him, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I [Paul] will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.*

Jeremiah Burroughs, a Puritan author, wrote this almost 400 years ago: *“Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God’s wise and fatherly disposal in every condition...It is a work of the Spirit ‘indoors’.*

Another writer put it this way: *Contentment is the product of a heart resting in God...It is the blessed assurance that God does all things well and is, even now, making all things work together for my ultimate good. (AW Pink)*

That all sounds so good, doesn’t it? But...We live in a culture that actually thrives on discontentment. Fear of missing out, You only live once, get it while you can...it pushes marketing and experiences in such a way that we often equate happiness with contentment. Especially right now in the Christmas season with all the ads saying, You need this, you have to have that. When we feel happy, we think, “I’m content”. Whether it’s a possession, a relationship or a position, we often find ourselves thinking, if I can just make more money, if I can just loose the weight, if we can just (you fill in the blank) then I’ll be happy...content.

In light of all that, on a scale of 1-10, how content would you say you are in life?

Let’s look at Verses 12-13 again, *I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.*

I love that Paul says, he learned this attitude, this inner Spirit work. The word strength in verse 13 is the Greek word *endunamoo* (en-doo-nama-ho), which means to receive strength, which in this context would mean to receive strength from Jesus. We receive *dunamis*, the inherent power to be content. as we depend on His strength that continually enables us to do what we couldn’t do ourselves. To

put the meanings with the words, it would read: The secret is knowing I can do all things – whatever works have been prepared for me – through, in connection with, the personal, intimate union with Jesus – who strengthens me – continually all the time. Paul has learned contentment because he has learned that Christ is sufficient, so he brings everything to him, with thanksgiving.

When I had my hip replaced a few years ago, I was given a walker and a cane to use as I healed. Why? Because, I couldn't lean on myself. As my hip adjusted to what was inside me, I went from walker to the cane until my strength grew through what had been placed inside me to a point that I could walk on my own. Now I walk freely, truly trusting that what is in me is strong and capable.

Can you trust that God's Spirit in you is strong and capable?

Contentment is a result of trust. It means you've let God be in charge instead of thinking it would be better if you ruled the world. In John 15:5, Jesus says "apart from me you can do nothing." Which is just what Paul has learned - that this supernatural trust, contentment, is based in Christ-sufficiency, not self-sufficiency as many Greeks thought. He had learned to see life from a God-viewpoint – he focused on what he needed to do, not what he had or didn't have.

Verse 13 is often quoted when someone is facing something hard – we say – You can do everything in Christ. But, in this context, we can see that Paul isn't saying – you can literally do anything physically through Christ – like run a marathon without training or ace a test without studying...He's saying that you can face anything because of Christ's strength in you. His power is sufficient to do his will and face the challenges that come from doing it. We aren't super-human, but we are spirit-filled.

With all that in mind, how content would you say you are in life?

The answer lies in your priorities, perspective, and source of strength.

We have come to the conclusion of Paul's letter:

*<sup>15</sup> As you know, you Philippians were the only ones who gave me financial help when I first brought you the Good News and then traveled on from Macedonia. No other church did this. <sup>16</sup> Even when I was in Thessalonica you sent help more than*

*once. <sup>17</sup> I don't say this because I want a gift from you. Rather, I want you to receive a reward for your kindness. Phil. 4:15-17*

Again, more gratitude for these dear people. The Philippians have learned the joy of giving, it's not about what we want but what we can give, share, love.

Paul goes on,

*<sup>18</sup> At the moment I have all I need—and more! I am generously supplied with the gifts you sent me with Epaphroditus. They are a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to God. <sup>19</sup> And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.*

*<sup>20</sup> Now all glory to God our Father forever and ever! Amen.*

*<sup>21</sup> Give my greetings to each of God's holy people—all who belong to Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send you their greetings. <sup>22</sup> And all the rest of God's people send you greetings, too, especially those in Caesar's household. Phil. 4:18-22*

God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches in Christ. Much like the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:33, *Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.*

What do you want?

What do you need?

There is a difference between wants and needs. Many want to feel good and avoid pain or discomfort. We may not get that. Paul echoes Jesus' words, As you seek Him, he will supply your needs.

What need do you have right now that you would like God to meet?

That's the tension, isn't it? We want to live content, but for some reason we've come to believe that contentment means we don't have any needs. But, that's not true.

When my husband was laid off years ago, we found ourselves in a new situation. Without his income, we had to make some hard decisions about finances, opportunities, and life style. I was in grad school, our kids were in Christian schools, and although I did work full-time, it was tight. I can honestly say, I was NOT content. We were trying to fix it, adjust and push through.

I learned how it felt to stand in a food line, to ask for financial help from friends, to shop for school clothes at the thrift store because we had to, not because it was cool. It was humbling, hard, and I asked God a lot of questions.

Then, one morning, I came across the verses in Matthew 6. *“If God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith? “So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ <sup>32</sup> These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. <sup>33</sup> Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.”* Matt. 6:31-33

These were my exact thoughts, what will we wear, and the words of Jesus hit me like a brick. God knew our needs, but we weren’t seeking Him as we should. We weren’t leaning into Him, trusting Him, we were doing the whole self-sufficiency thing. A bit like the Grinch, my heart changed that day. I had to learn, but God showed us over and over again how much he does care in those months as He provided in ways we would have never imagined.

Our kids changed schools, I was offered a side-gig, and Bill discovered a new vocation, yet the lessons I learned during that season will forever be with me. We began to learn that contentment is inner work, trusting that God is who he says he is, leaning into his promises while also bringing our needs before him. I found that it means I bring my requests, keeping my heart in thanksgiving, surrendering myself to however he answers knowing He is enough.

Going back to Jeremiah Burroughs, he wrote: *Our contentment does not consist in getting the thing we desire, but in God’s fashioning our spirits to our conditions... True contentment... is achieved by subtraction and not by addition; by surrender and not struggle.”*

As we come to the end of this beautiful letter, we return to the main theme - joy. Joy is unveiled as we lean into those we share this life journey with. Joy is unveiled as we discover more and more what it means to live as a citizen of heaven. Joy is a life lived for Christ, it's a byproduct of maturity in Christ.

Joy is unveiled within you as you learn what it means to be contentment, knowing and believing that Christ is enough. It's living with thanksgiving while leaning into his strength within you, bringing everything to him. It's trusting him to supply your needs, relying on him in every circumstance allowing the work of the Spirit within. *"It is the blessed assurance that God does all things well and is, even now, making all things work together for my ultimate good."* (A W Pink)

Now, Dear One, we close this time together in Philippians with the final verse: *May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.* Phil. 4:23

Amen.

Thank you for joining me on this journey through Philippians and the unveiling of Joy in Jesus. I look forward to our next season together which will begin in January, 2024. I invite you to revisit Episodes 21-27 which focus in on the Christmas season.

May your Christmas be full of blessing and Joy.