

Philippians 4:10-23

WELCOME

START WITH:

I am my most relaxed when _____.

I am my angriest when _____.

INTRODUCTION: Somebody very famous once said, "I have an iron will, and all of my will has always been to conquer some horrible feeling of inadequacy.....I push past one spell of it and discover myself as a special human being and then I get to another stage and think I'm mediocre and uninteresting.....Again and again. My drive in life is from this horrible fear of being mediocre. And that's always pushing me, pushing me. Because even though I've become Somebody, I still have to prove that I'm *Somebody*. My struggle has never ended and it probably never will."

Clearly this person struggles to find contentment. Can you think of someone in your life that *did* exude contentment? How? What was their secret?

Read Philippians 4:10-13

10 I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. 11 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. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

We gain here a window on Paul as a very human Christian, facing difficulties and troubles, and having to learn the hard way to cope with them. No instant or easy solutions for him. No casual "leave it all to God" approach, ignoring the real problems of Christian living and ministry. No: the steady schoolwork God had set him, of finding out the secret of having plenty or having nothing. And this is the secret, as with everything else for Paul: the God he knew in Jesus enabled him to face everything with a strength that came from *OUTSIDE*.

Stoic Philosophy regarding autarkeia—contentment: *INSIDE*

1. Eliminate all desire. Get to a point in which you need nothing. Socrates: "He who is content with least is nature's wealth."
2. Eliminate all emotions. Ge to a point in which you don't care what happens to yourself or to anyone else.
3. How does one do this? See everything as God's will. However painful something was, it was God's will. It was useless to struggle against it.

Today's Philosophy regarding autarkeia—contentment: *OUTSIDE TO OBJECTS*

1. Love—In the song “Bewitched” a woman admits that the man she’s fallen for is a fool, and will let her down, but, she says, “I’m wild again, beguiled again, a simpering, whimpering child again.” The singers are overdependent on being in love. Without a romantic relationship of some kind, even the wrong kid, their lives feel meaningless.
2. Money—“Man must have an idol—the amassing of wealth is one of the worst species of idolatry. I will resign my business at 35, but during the ensuing two years, I wish to spend the afternoons reading.” Andrew Carnegie never followed through on this statement. Yes, Carnegie built many libraries. Most of his workers, however, died in their early 40’s or earlier, from accidents or disease.
3. Success—“These days people don’t abuse alcohol. They abuse their lives....You’re successful, so good things happen. That feeling doesn’t last forever, and you slide back to normal.....An achievement addict is no different from any other kind of addict.”

The Apostle Paul’s Philosophy regarding autarkeia—contentment: *OUTSIDE SELF TO CHRIST*

Paul could face anything. Paul had desires. Paul had emotions. He could have nothing—And he could have all things. It made no difference, because, in any situation, he had Jesus.

The Stoic was self sufficient. Paul was God-sufficient.

Discussion: How are you handling contentment in these times? What are some positive examples of contentment that you have seen?

Read Philippians 4:14-23

14 Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. 15 And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. 16 Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. 18 I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. 19 And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. 20 To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. 21 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. 22 All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. 23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Now we understand the overall mood of joy in this letter. Paul was moved to joy because of the support and generosity of these Christians. Paul’s joy, however, was not in what the gift of money did for him.....but in what it did for them.

The phrase “an odor of sweet savour” brought to mind how the smell of the sacrifices was sweet in the nostrils of God (Genesis 8:21; Leviticus 1: 9,13,17).

Discussion: Do you agree with this statement: The giver of a gift does not make himself poorer; he makes himself richer, for his own gift opens to him the gifts and the riches of God.

The end of this letter ends with a very cryptic phrase. Paul sends greetings from the Christian brothers who are of Caesar's household. Christianity at a very early period had reached the very center of the Roman government.

PLANS FOR THANKSGIVING

CLOSING PRAYER