

PHILIPPIANS: Picture Joy

August 25 (TONO): Learn to Be Content (inspire participation in our ministries): Philippians 4:10-13: *I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. 11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 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. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*

Intro: I snapped a picture of the large glass box in which the chains of Paul were draped. Or so they say. It was a sobering moment for me, bringing home a reality that I had often read about. But standing in Rome in the church called “St. Paul in Chains,” I experienced Paul’s condition and situation in a new way.

I also saw his attitude in a different light. Seeing the clasps that captured his wrists and ankles, I realized the true confinement he endured and the implications of it. He was a prisoner of Rome facing possible execution in the near future.

I have often been on death row. Some people there seem insane to me, unable or unwilling to have a conversation. They are trapped in perpetual disorientation, a mental maze. Others are hyper-concerned, perpetually entreating others to intervene, to make contact with attorneys or loved ones, insisting they are innocent.

But everyone is working on their case in one way or another. They are all in the process of appeal. They are all hoping for a commuted sentence or a new trial. Very few death row inmates want to die. That is my experience of them.

Paul doesn’t want to die. Like all of us, he has work to do. He has friends to help. He has churches to teach and plant. He indicates to these Christians in Philippi that he expects to be able to remain in the flesh because that is more necessary for them.

So how is he content? He sees his situation as sharing in the sufferings of Christ. He is here for the sake of the gospel. He has complete confidence in the providence of God—that God will work out his circumstances for the furtherance of the Gospel. He can already see how that is taking place. He is content.

I. RENEW YOUR CONCERN: *I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me* (Philippians 4:10).

A. Concern and contentment: do they fit together? Concern here is a translation of the word *phroneo* which is about the mind, “thinking” or the focus of your thought. He is saying that for a while he was not in their thoughts. They got distracted in the normal activities of life, caught up in other things. And they just didn’t think about him.

1. Contentment and concern go together. They are not opposites. They are complements.

2. Concern is the focus of mind upon that which is a priority to you. If you focus on the trivia of life, you will never feel satisfied or content. You know you are wasting your time, your life, and your energy.

3. A proper focus of mind, appropriate concern or care, is a prelude to contentment. You are content when you are working on the true issues of life.

B. Renewal translates the word “to be green again” or “to sprout again.”

***I pulled up a crepe myrtle about 2 feet tall that had taken root in the front flowerbed and replanted it in a bucket. I thought I might want to use it somewhere. All the leaves fell off the branches except for two, and they were kind of crisp. I thought it had died. A couple of weeks passed and, wallah, the plant sprouted a whole new crop of leaves. That is renewal.

C. Life is a series of renewals, revivals, getting new life.

***The pattern of the pelican: rise, glide, dive, rest.

D. Renewal is a work of Spirit: “Revive us again, fill each heart with thy love, may each soul be rekindled with fire from above.”

E. It must be sought more deliberately as you age. “It’s hard to get charred wood burning.” We settle into our routines. Routines may become ruts—graves with the ends knocked out.

II. SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY: *Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it* (Philippians 4:10).

A. They lacked the opportunity. Paul refines his previous statement. He implied that the Philippians had lost their concern. Rather, they lacked the opportunity to show it. That is different.

1. Sometimes we experienced deep and troubling frustration because we have a true concern but no way to address it. This situation can even produce hopelessness in us.

2. This is often true of social or societal issues that are deeply troubling to us. We look at the homicide rate in New Orleans. We really, really want to make an impact on it, as does our Mayor. Yet year by year it seems to be as inevitable as the tides on Lake Pontchartrain or alligators in the bayous.

B. True concern will NOTICE THE NEED.

1. The church at Philippi heard about or saw the need of the Apostle Paul, and they responded.

2. God shows us the need if we are truly concerned. Seeing the need is essential to seeing the opportunity.

3. Some people never see the need. They walk right by it. They are not tuned in to that person or circumstance. Others see the need immediately because it is in the arena of their true concern.

C. Hear the Call. Paul had a Macedonian Call. That is what first took him to Philippi. He knew with certainty that God was calling him to go there. We all want such a clear call. The call is often complex.

1. Seeing the need is part of the call. Not everyone sees it. Your ability to see it means something.

2. Knowing you can help is part of the call. Some needs are beyond your own skills or giftedness. You see the person needs heart surgery, but you cannot do it. If you see a need with which you can help, you are two steps toward the call.

3. Feeling your passion is part of the call. Something must rise in your own spirit about this need. Even though the turn to Macedonia was a right-angle turn for the Apostle Paul, it was perfectly consistent with what God was doing in his life—reaching the Gentiles.

D. Seize the opportunity.

1. We are making ministry accessible to every person in our church. That is the effort through Care Effect.

2. We have many testimonies about how God used Care Effect to link a person's gifts with an evident need.

E. Expect the blessing. The most predictable Care Effect is what happens to the caregiver. If you give of yourself to another person you will be blessed. It is more blessed to give than to receive. This increased blessedness can always be counted on.

III. LEARN THE SECRET: *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. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength* (Philippians 4:12-13).

***The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life by Hannah Whitall Smith is one of the most popular books ever written. It comes down to this: the person trusts God, and God does the work.

A. Everybody feels inadequate. We all shrink from the challenge at first. Everybody thinks that someone else can do it better, is better equipped, more talented.

B. Everybody has a job. This is how God builds the body, his church. We all have our unique assignment.

C. Everybody depends on Christ. The resources of his grace are sufficient for our need.

***Illustration of the power steering in our vehicles. The power is not unleashed until you turn that wheel. Then the hydraulics kick in and you navigate three tons of steel with a couple of fingers. It is not your strength but the power activated by your motion.

1. I CAN DO. I am not going to be stuck on "I cannot do." That is a failure from the start. I CAN DO means that I have the capacity, ability, and potential that is required to succeed.

2. ALL THINGS. That means that nothing is impossible with God. It means that I should not shrink from any challenge that I believe God to be in. Whatever the circumstance, I can do.

3. THROUGH CHRIST WHO GIVES ME STRENGTH. The resources of Christ are available to me. He is the one who works in me to accomplish this task, part of All Things.

D. Be a DISCIPLE IN MOTION. The disciple in motion has two advantages immediately. She is demonstrating her trust in God by moving into the harvest even though she has questions and hesitations. She is getting out of the paralysis of indecision into the energy of work and activity.

Conclusion: