

Count Your Blessings: Learning the Secret of Contentment
Philippians 4:10-13

November 23, 2008

Dr. Steve Horn

There's a classic Peanuts cartoon that shows Snoopy on his doghouse one Thanksgiving. He is grumbling about being stuck with dog food while all the humans are inside enjoying turkey, gravy, cranberries, and pumpkin pie. "Of course, it could be worse," he finally reflected. "I could have been born a turkey."

Contentment and thanksgiving seem to go together. We consider the letter of Philippians to be a letter of thanksgiving, but notice the text in Philippians 4.

Text: **10** But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. **11** Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: **12** I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. **13** I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Introduction: If we are not careful, Thanksgiving will come and go each year with only a passing thought from us. The spirit of thanksgiving is one of the basic qualities God longs for in His children. Perhaps we lack thanksgiving, because we lack contentment. Would you allow God today to walk you through some parts of your life to show you the many blessings? The hymn writer urges us to *Count {Our} Blessings*. Let us do that today as we seek to learn the secret of contentment.

I Count as my blessings the . . .

1. People God has allowed me to know (1:3-8)

Paul is content first of all because of the people God has placed in his life. We read about that in the beginning of this letter.

3 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, **4** always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, **5** for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, **6** being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ; **7** just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. **8** For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.

In chapter 4, he is again thanking them for what they are willing to do for him.

When I think of people, I can be thankful for . . .

- What they have done for me.

My list is long of the people that have been a blessing to me. I think of teachers and coaches as I was going through school. In our first church, I think about the blessing of friendship of a man

by the name of James Stewart who lived across the street. The story is too long and personal, but I don't know if I would still be in the ministry if he would not have been so faithful to the LORD and to us in my first crisis as a pastor.

I am thankful for people like Tom and Nan Hudson (Nan passed away earlier this year) No finer two people have ever walked the face of the earth, and I had the privilege of being their pastor. I think about a lady named Rosalie Lang who kept Josh for us in the first two years of his life. Never has God been so gracious to us than to bring this dear lady into our family's life.

I think about a gentleman with us today, Dr. Perry Sanders, the pastor of this wonderful church for 47 years. He probably exaggerates a little, but almost weekly he tells me that's the best sermon he's ever heard. He's preached a thousand better, but he tells me that anyway.

- What God has done and is doing in them.

I am also grateful for the way that God is working in people's lives. No greater thrill is mine than to see people walk in obedience to the LORD.

2. Problems God has allowed me to face (1:12-14)

I am also thankful for the problems that God has allowed me to face. Understand that I sometimes struggle with being thankful for these problems. But, when we are able to sit back, many times years later, and see what God was doing in the problems, we can be thankful.

12 But I want you to know, brethren, that the things *which happened* to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, **13** so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; **14** and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Notice the benefits of the problems.

- Strategic Contacts—Though in prison, Paul was thankful for the contacts that prison brought to him to share the Gospel.
- Strengthened the Courage of others
- My Savior will be Celebrated.

Yet, I recognize that during the problem it is not easy to give thanks. A story from the life of Matthew Henry reveals how a Christian should think when circumstances don't go the way we would necessarily like. The well-known Bible commentator, was once robbed by thieves who took all of his money. Opening his diary later that evening, Henry wrote, 'Let me be thankful, first because I was never robbed before; second, because although they took my purse, they didn't take my life; third, although they took my all, it wasn't much. And fourth because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed.'

3. Past from which God has delivered me (3:4-10)

4 though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: **5** circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; **6** concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

7 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. **8** Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ **9** and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; **10** that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

Paul was thankful for the deliverance he had from his past. If we are Christians, we can always be thankful for the grace of Jesus Christ. We can always be thankful for a relationship with Jesus Christ.

4. Place God has assured me will be my home (3:20)

20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

Paul was confident that he had a place in Heaven. That's reason for real thanksgiving.

5. Personal relationship I have with Christ (4:13)

13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Rick Warren has written, "The grass isn't greener on the other side; it's greener where it is watered." You water by giving thanks. Thanksgiving and contentment go together hand in hand.