

Joyful Contentment Group Leader Notes

This is our last week for our small group Philippiian study! It has been a great series, and I hope your group has benefited from it. In the conclusion of his letter, Paul shares a powerful secret that we all long for – how he has learned to live in contentment (and joy) through any circumstance or situation. He concludes his letter by thanking them for the ways that they have consistently been used by God to meet his needs. Further, they have demonstrated generous partnership with Paul in seeing the Gospel go to the nations.

This week's discussion will focus in on contentment, generosity, gratitude, and how those three things can be influential.



1. What would you need to be content in life?

Just a simple question to get the discussion going.



Read Philippians 4:10-23.



2. In verses 10-12, we see that Paul learned to be content in all situations. Looking back in scripture, when did Paul find himself in times of want and times of plenty?

Here are two passages to look at with your group: the first passage is Acts chapters 27 and 28. In them, Paul is detained for his faith and taken to Rome for trial. During a violent storm, the ship he is traveling on is wrecked. All aboard make to the shores of Malta safely, but even then, Paul is bitten by a venomous snake. The locals thought Paul would surely die, but the Lord spared him. As a result, they thought Paul to be a god. An official of the island invited him into his palace, where every one of Paul's needs were met. Here is one passage where Paul experiences extreme want, which was followed by extreme plenty.

The second set of verses is 2 Corinthians 11:21-33. Here, Paul boasts about himself and his sufferings. Suffering is rarely something we tend to boast about. However, Paul is making a point as he addresses the false teachers that had infiltrated the Corinthian church. Ultimately, he boasts in the Lord. In this passage he talks about the sufferings he had experienced. He even mentions being shipwrecked three separate times. Do not assume the shipwreck in Act 27 is included in this, since Paul wrote to the Corinthians before the events in Acts 27. That means Paul was shipwrecked more than three times in his life! The point of this question is to add validity to Paul's statement of being in both want and plenty. It is also to point out the fact that he could not just sympathize with Philippiian believers, but with us as well.



3. Does contentment come easy to you? Why is it hard to be content during times of need?

It is natural for us to desire things we need. The problem is that we tend to blur the line between what we want and what we need. In John 17:6-19, we see Jesus pray for His disciples. He specifically prays for their needs. It would be advantageous to walk your group through this passage to point out the things that Jesus knew His disciples needed. In addition, Jesus also states that God does supply all of our needs in Matthew 6:25-34.



Read Philippians 4:14-20.

4. Who ultimately benefitted from the Philippians' gifts and discuss how they benefit?

The answer to who benefit from the gifts is: both Paul and the Philippians. Paul's needs were met at the receiving of the gifts. However, the Philippians were ultimately blessed by their generosity. Paul says, "I'm looking for the profit that increases to your account." (4:17) These terms were common accounting words. Paul is saying that when you give to the Lord's work, you're putting "money" into your account in the Bank of Heaven, and it pays guaranteed high interest for all eternity. If you have any money invested in stocks or mutual funds, you realize that the riskier the investment, the greater the chance that you can make high returns, but also the greater the chance that you can lose a lot. Even the "safe" investments have no guarantees. But when you invest in God's work, there is no risk and you get the highest possible return on your investment, guaranteed by the very Word of God!



5. In what situations do you find it easy to be generous? What situations are a little more challenging for you?

The point of this question is to seek the heart behind giving. It is typically easy for us to give to people in need with whom we have a relationship with. On the contrary, many people have a difficult time when they don't see every outcome of a situation. Being a wise steward of the resources God has entrusted us with is necessary. However, we must be obedient to the Holy Spirit when we are prompted to give, despite not having all the answers or details.



Read Philippians 4:21-23.

6. How was Paul connected to people in Caesar's household?

“Caesar’s household” could refer not only to the royal family, but to anyone connected with the emperor’s service. This would include soldiers, slaves, or freedmen. It is likely that some of the latter group had responded positively to Paul’s message. The fact that some within Caesar’s circles had believed would have had significant resonance in Roman Philippi. We also know, based on Philippians 1:12-13, that Paul’s imprisonment served to advance the Gospel, so that it had become known throughout the whole imperial guard, that his imprisonment was for Christ.



7. As a group, take time to share about someone in your Oikos that you need to intentionally influence towards Christ. How can your group pray for you and/or them?

It is important to share with your group about the people God has placed in your life. There is power in intercessory prayer, and it is important as a group to know how to be praying for those who your group members are being intentional with as they seek to point them towards Christ.