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**Greater Joy**  
**Part 9 – Gifts that Please God**  
Pastor Ted Cunningham

We are going to finish this great series in a great book, Philippians, today with *Gifts that Please God*. If you have your Bibles, turn to Philippians 4. We're going to kick it off with Verse 10. But before we do, I want to ask a question. Are you a thermometer or a thermostat? Have you ever thought about this? I didn't, until this week, until somebody asked me to think about it.

A thermostat isn't changing. You set the thermostat and it's steady. And I speak on behalf of all women when I say don't touch the thermostat. Just let the thermostat be with whatever they set it at. But a thermometer is constantly changing, based on surroundings. Warren Wiersbe shares this great story on the difference between a thermometer and a thermostat as they are looking at new leaders for the church.

Here's how the story goes. *"The trouble with him is that he's a thermometer and not a thermostat!" This statement by one of his deacons aroused the pastor's curiosity. They were discussing possible board members, and Jim's name had come up.*

*"Pastor, it's like this," the deacon explained. "A thermometer doesn't change anything around it – it just registers the temperature. It's always going up and down. But a thermostat regulates the surroundings and changes them when they need to be changed. Jim is a thermometer – he lacks the power to change things. Instead, they change him!"*

Who thinks that's the chairman of the deacon board right there? I think that guy is in charge of the deacons.

Warren Wiersbe says, *"The apostle Paul was a thermostat, not a thermometer. Instead of having spiritual ups and downs as the situation changed, he went right on steadily doing his work and serving Christ."*

Today, we are going to see my circumstances do not determine my relationship with the Lord. Whether I'm eating well or not much. Whether I'm living well or not living so well as far as housing may go. None of that determines my relationship with the Lord. And we are going to see in the text today this flexibility and this stability that Paul has in the extreme circumstances of life.

Now, most scholars believe that the text we're in today is Paul's entire reason for writing the letter to the church at Philippi. It is a thank you letter for their gifts. He's expressing great joy, he's rejoicing in them, but he is thanking them.

**10 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.** Verse 10 is Paul's polite way of saying, "You've always had concern for me, but I know you didn't always have the opportunity to show it as I have moved around." And in this situation now, he is under house arrest, probably chained to a Roman soldier, and he's saying "Now, you've had opportunity, you've sent this gift. You've always been concerned."

**11 I am not saying this because I am in need...** He's not thanking them because he wants more. He says, **...for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.** The word *learned* there means I've experienced them. The highs and lows we're going to talk about, I've experienced them all. The word *content* there actually means and *learned* means this idea of intimately acquainted with. I've experienced poverty, I've experience plenty, I've experienced want, I've experienced plenty, I've gone through the ups and downs.

One of my comedian friends says, "Life is all about ups and downs, ups and downs, and when you give your life to Christ, he's come to make life even more fulfilling for you, which just means it goes a little bit more with the ups and downs."

But we don't change based on that because he says we've learned the secret to be content.

**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.** And today, before we talk about gifts that please God and generosity, we're going to learn this secret. He says, "I've learned. I've experienced all sorts of different circumstances, but now I can tell you and boldly proclaim to you what the secret of contentment is in and every situation **...whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.**"

Who has ever lived in want? How many of you have lived in plenty? How many of you prefer plenty? He's saying it doesn't matter because that's not the secret. The secret isn't being in want and figuring out a strategy to get more. That's not going to be the secret. Let me just work through this. You will never be happy with your income, satisfied with what you have, or find true joy in your heart until you learn the secret of being content. There are people in here who make six figures, and guess what? They ain't content. There are people in here that make \$25,000.00 a year or \$30,000 a year and they are content.

What contentment is not? Let's look a few of them. Contentment is not based on what we eat. And I like to eat. I'm the one that talks about the next meal while eating this meal. Amy and I, as Christmas is coming up... It's so funny. Yesterday, Saturday, I am talking about our meals on Wednesday, our meals on Friday. Contentment is not what you have in the cupboard. Contentment is not based on your bank account. The infomercials are fun to watch but let me tell you the infomercials do not share with you the secret of contentment. "Ted, I've learned the secret of contentment. Get out of the stock market and buy gold. Protect it. Once you have gold, like all those old actors tell us to get. Then I'll be content."

That's wrong. You can all have the gold in the world. You're like, "Ted, I sleep a little bit better with a mattress full of gold."

It's not based on your living conditions. I love fly fishing and you know my favorite place to fly fish in the entire world is the Ozarks. Let's just establish that before I tell you I also enjoy fly fishing in the Smokey Mountains. There's a place Amy and I love to go. I fly fish every time I'm there. There's this little cabin. This is where you go when you get ready. I absolutely love this cabin. Amy actually took this picture, printed, and it's on my desk. You go there, you tell them your shoe size. There's a wood burning stove. I was there once when it was about 25 degrees. And the boots are frozen. He sets them on the woodburning stove. Everything about this is awesome.

Then as Amy and I walk each day by this cabin... I stopped once a couple of years ago and I go, "Amy, I want to live in that cabin." Amy is always one that wants to help me make my dreams come true. She said, "I want that for you. The problem is you'll live in it alone. I ain't living in it with you." We laugh, but I had a conversation with her as we continued our walk. I told her, "The problem is you are spoiled. I've spoiled you with that indoor plumbing." See, my wife likes a toilet and a shower inside the house. How many of you are with my wife? How many of you can have it outside a few yards away? You'd be surprised. She says, "I'm just going to get you a picture of it. You can dream about it because I want you to know that picture on your desk is where your dreams go to die."

It's important that we really dig into this because when we get to the secret, a lot of times we always go to the more part, the plenty part, but I'm at a place where I want less maintenance on a house. I just replaced the water heater for like the third time in 14 years. Guess what happens to my joy when the water heater goes out. If we didn't have hot water, we wouldn't have to worry about that. Some of you, if you were told hail hit your house and you're ready to get it replaced, you know how much it's going to cost and how much time it's going to take to fix your roof. I can fix that roof with a blue tarp from Home Depot for about 20 bucks and an hour or two.

What am I doing when I role play all of this on our walk, besides lowering the quality of our marital satisfaction? I'm convincing myself that I would be happier, I would find more joy if I had... A bigger house. Some of you are like, "A bigger house, We want bigger houses, Ted. We want the toilet inside the house, not outside the house." Let me just tell you it doesn't matter where your toilet is. I just want you to think about it over Christmas. Your toilet and its location doesn't determine your contentment. The square footage of your house does not determine your contentment. Do you want to get to the secret? He's very clear on the secret. Philippians 4: 13 is one of the most quoted verses in all of the Bible and one of the most interpreted verses in all of the Bible. This is the secret of being content in any and every situation.

***13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*** Let's look at what this verse is not before we look at what he is saying in context. Philippians 4: 13 is not about helping your team win. Do you know what this verse is about? This verse is saying you can be content in all things, not good things, all things. Meaning you can be content when your team loses, and wins. I watched the Chief's game this week. Your joy was affected going into overtime. Can I get an amen on that? I was stressed out going into overtime until Kelce ran that ball through like he was delivering a package to the endzone.

It's not about helping you win because you can do *all things* through Christ is what he is saying. Contentment is not based on the circumstances. This is not about achieving big dreams. Some of you have died to your dreams. Some of you had a dream fall apart and guess what? You can do all things through Christ who gives you strength. You can go through the death of a dream. You can go through the fulfillment of a dream. It's not about accomplishing career goals. All things refers to surviving the extremes of life. Living in want and having plenty. Plenty in the bank, not that much in the bank. Good seasons, tough seasons. Seasons of rejoicing, seasons of mourning. He's saying whatever the circumstances, I've experienced it. He says I've learned. I'm intimately acquainted with all of this, and I've learned that the secret is Christ, not the fluctuation.

You see, with the word *content* here, he's really pulling from the philosophers of that day who loved the word content meaning self-sufficiency. Look inside, look inside, everything you need is inside. Really what Paul is doing is saying, It's not self-sufficiency, it's Christ-sufficiency. It's not relying on yourself for contentment and digging down deep enough so you can find it. No, it's relying on Christ. My relationship with the Lord doesn't change based on my circumstances. My relationship with the Lord keeps me flexible, confident, and steady in the extremes of life, not changing back and forth.

In Job, we read that this contentment affects our worship. ***The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed by the name of the Lord.***

Paul says to young pastor Timothy, ***...but godliness with contentment is great gain for we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have. Because God has said, "Never will I leave you and never will I forsake you."***

Some of you have experienced as low as it gets, and you've got nothing and He's all you've got. You know those moments where you're able to be fully content. It affects our relationships.

Proverbs 15: 17 says, ***Better a small serving of vegetables with love than a fattened calf with hatred.*** Meaning when we are content, we realize who is around the table is far more important than what is on the table.

We practice hospitality, we provide food and drink, we receive it with thanksgiving. ***Eat your food with gladness,*** Ecclesiastes says, ***drink your wine with a joyful heart for now God approves what you do.***

Yes, what's on the table is important, but who is gathered around it is from more important.

Now, Paul moves from contentment into the gift that he receives from the Philippians. ***14 Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles.*** That's what we do as a church every time we help someone with benevolence, every time we support a missionary or meet a need, maybe an emergency has hit the missionary on the field that he or she needs help with. ***15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need.*** Now, Verse 17, this is very

important because what he's going to say is your motive for giving, your relationship with the Lord far outweighs the gift being received. **17 Not that I desire your gifts...** Again, this is a thank you. He's not requesting more. **"what I desire is that more be credited to your account. 18 I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent.** And look at how the offering they sent is described. **They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.**

Giving is an act of worship. If you are new to our church and you wonder why, when we take an offering, there are some people around you that cheer. It's because years ago, we really encouraged people to do that. We're cheering because that's the act of cheerful giving, but it's also part of our worship. We clap and give praise to the Lord during worship when we're singing together. We do the same when we are giving. Giving is an act of worship. But maybe, if you grew up in church, you've heard this expression. I know the Baptists have. "Don't rob me of a blessing." That means when someone gives something to you that you don't need, that you didn't expect, that you didn't request, you don't push it away, you receive it. What a great instruction for us. He says, **Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. 18 I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied,** but I want you to know what this does for you and your relationship with the Lord.

Let me tell you what's going to happen on Christmas morning to some. A lot of hands went up in the first service on this one. There are going to be some husbands in here that open a gift on Christmas morning. They are going to look inside, and this is going to be their initial expression and thought, "This is too much. Come on." You're the bucket of sunshine on Christmas morning, let's just be really honest. Because you're thinking about the money. "I don't need this. You shouldn't have."

When we were first married and didn't have a lot... We were trying to buy furniture and piece stuff together. We didn't want our parents' hand-me-down mattress, we wanted to buy a fresh one. We were broke. And on my first birthday as a new husband, I remember we had a couple of people coming over. Amy takes me into the bedroom and goes, "I got you an aquarium that you're going to be opening in a minute. This was her setting me up for it. She goes, "One, I need you to act surprised. Two, just receive it. Don't look and think about how much it cost. Don't ask me how much I spent." This was 1996, before online banking. Usually, you had to wait a few weeks to find out how much was spent, but now it's on demand. I'm like, "What did you just do at Target? Take it back."

How many of you do that? You know what I'm talking about. You don't receive things. I don't need it. You shouldn't have. This is too extravagant. Can I just encourage you on Christmas? Receive it with thanksgiving. Let's practice it. These are really challenging words. Here we go; are you ready? Thank you. Not this too much you, shouldn't have done this. Don't rob someone of the gift they want to give you. Allow them to be that blessing. Allow them to practice generosity.

What he's saying to the Philippians here and it's what I'm so proud of this church over these many years. A generous church identifies and gives to those who least expect it and don't request it.

Your generosity is *a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God* because of how well you have been giving.

We do this all throughout the year, but at the end of the year, we're like clear out that account, clear out that line item, help people from benevolence to our missionaries. Already, all throughout the year, we meet needs that are requested and that's great, but this week, because of your generosity, I'd like to read for you some of the gifts that you made to people that were not expecting them and they didn't ask for them.

I'm just going to read through it and I hope you see how God is using you to reach people in Woodland Hills, in the Ozarks, and to the ends off the earth.

\$10,000 to Options Pregnancy Clinic.

\$10,000 to Fellowship of Christian Athletes, South Central Missouri Chapter

\$10,000 to K-Life, Tri-lakes

\$10,000 to The Miners, our missionaries in Indonesia

\$5,000 to International Students Incorporated, the Mannons at Rutgers University

\$30,000 to Convoy of Hope to help meet the needs of those in the storm's path

\$10,000 to Pastor Serve, a ministry that help pastors recover.

\$10,000 to Cross International to help with teacher salaries in Haiti

\$10,000 to The Women's Crisis Center in Taney County

\$10,000 to Taney and Stone county schools for hygiene supplies on top of Care for Kids

\$7,000 to The White River Coffee Company

\$30,000 to Campout, the summer camp program that we run for one week, but we want to scholarship that so those in our community and many on the Strip are able to participate.

\$20,000 toward the purchase of one of the homes with Elevate Branson

\$15,000 so far and it may be more to single moms and widows in our church who have not asked for it, but we know the need. I don't have the number all added up but I just want to say thank you, Woodland Hills, for just what you did last week and how you continue.

The best part about it is it feels like it a lot of the tone of Paul in Philippians, we start giving. The Mannons sent us a thank you email. Options pregnancy Clinic sent us an email. I'm sure there are more we will get this week. It's because you have been generous.

I want you to see this nugget that ends the book just as it started. Remember, at the beginning of the series, we looked at that because Paul is under house arrest, the good news of Jesus was spreading through the palace guard. I love that because we talked about the fact that sometimes we think our circumstances are keeping us from doing what we had planned on doing, yet God is using me in the circumstances I'm in that I never planned on. When you continue reading in Philippians 4: 19 – 20 as we bring this great book to a close, Paul says to the Philippians:

**19 And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.**

**20 To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever.** And all God's people said... **Amen.**

**21 Greet all God's people in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings.**

Brothers and sisters in Christ. **22 All God's people here send you greetings...** I love this last line. Don't overlook introductions and conclusions because they tell us so much, even in these small books like the pastoral and prison epistles. ...**especially those who belong to Caesar's household.** I love that because what it's saying is people have been saved because of the gifts that you've sent. It wasn't the plan, but God has used it. And of all I just shared with you, you don't know, I don't know, none of us know exactly how God is going to use our generosity. We don't know who is going to come to faith in Jesus because of it. But when he says, "Especially those who belong to Caesar's household," that should put a smile on your face to go, Yes! Yes! From the Palace Guard, the news was spreading, and people were giving their lives to Jesus.

**23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.** And all God's people said... **Amen.**

I hope you find greater joy in this Christmas season. I hope whatever is under your tree, whatever is not under your tree... I was thinking about the husband who is thinking about, *oh, you shouldn't have spent this kind of money.* You know what conversations won't be happening in homes on Christmas morning? You're not going to hear a four- or five-year-old open and gift, look at it, and say "Mom, this is too much. Take it back. You know how I want underwear for Christmas."

Father, that we would receive every bit as we talked about giving and being generous as you've called us to be, that we would receive generosity when it's poured out on us, that we would receive the unexpected and unrequested gifts with a thank you, with gratefulness, knowing it's not about me or what I'm getting, but it's about what you're doing in the hearts and lives of the givers. May we receive gifts with gratefulness this season. May we be generous and give gifts with generosity and contentment this season.

For the one who has never placed faith in Jesus, I pray that today is the day they confess with their mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in their heart that he has been raised from the dead. I pray you use our next weekend, Christmas weekend service, our online service to reach thousands and thousands of people that many would come to know Christ as savior and that this church would end another great year of you working through our lives and through this church.

We love you and we celebrate Christ and exalt Christ this season. And it is in the name of Jesus that we pray it. Everyone agreed and said... Amen.