

In Abundance and In Need

It has been carved into wooden plaques, sewn into Bible covers, printed on posters, and taped to mirrors. A familiar verse, it is often committed to memory by Christians:

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. (Phil. 4:13 - NASB)

All too often this passage has been quoted in sermons and books alongside admonitions to keep a positive attitude toward life. It has been used to tell us that we can reach new heights and accomplish great things for the Lord.

There is certainly nothing wrong with keeping a positive attitude or being a part of a great effort for the Lord, but let's look a little closer.

The Apostle Paul had expressed his thankfulness to the Christians in Philippi for their generosity. He told the Christians that he was not speaking out of a sense of need, because he had learned the *secret of contentment* in all circumstance of life.

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. I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:12-13 - NIV)

Judging from the behavior of our society, contentment is rare. Most folks *appear* to have learned how to live in prosperity, but struggle in difficult times.

You see, this verse is not about soaring with the eagles with success through a positive mental attitude. Rather, it is about survival. It is a statement that calls our attention to the One who provides us strength when our circumstances change whether for good or bad. The central thought is

that our external circumstances do not provide meaning in life; our circumstances do not have to rule over us. However, many people, even Christians, live in the past as if those were really better days; or they live in the future, never content with their current situation.

We might benefit from a peek back into the book of Ecclesiastes:

There is a time for every event under heaven:

**A time to give birth and a time to die;
A time to weep and a time to laugh;
A time to keep and a time to throw away;
A time for war and a time for peace.
(Excerpts from Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)**

Circumstances in life change and we should not be surprised. Our hope is in Christ, and our eyes should be trained toward eternity.

Thankfully, many Christians have learned this valuable lesson of contentment. They know that they can lean on Jesus difficult circumstances. They give over their cares to him and rest their anxieties on his shoulders. However, there is more to contentment. The Apostle Paul was content, not only in difficult circumstances, but also in times of plenty.

Consider how ancient Israel often turned to idolatry during times of peace and prosperity (Read Deuteronomy 8, or the book of Judges.) It is in prosperity that we also can fall to the alluring ways of this world. For that reason, it is equally important to learn how to lean on Jesus and how to honor God in times of peace and prosperity; in times when things are going our way.

May we find the strength of contentment in Jesus, both in times of need and in times of abundance.

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