



+ **YOU**

**Sermon Series: How to Avoid Life's Pitfalls**  
**To be used with: The Pitfall of Bitterness**  
**Sermon Title Possibilities: Content**  
**Not Bitter**  
**Scripture: Philippians 4:10-14**

**Connection with Unit Theme:** To complement the small group study “*The Pitfall of Bitterness*,” this sermon will explore Paul’s circumstances and point out how contentment helped him avoid bitterness.

**Introduction:** If we focus on our circumstances, we are apt to become bitter. If we are being honest, we tend to see things through a negative light. If we have a used car, we want a new one. We are never content with the fact that we have a car. If we have a refrigerator with food inside, we want different food to eat. We are rarely grateful for the fact that we have food.

The Bible has a host of examples of people who were content, even when circumstances were less than ideal. Joseph, in the Old Testament, did not allow bitterness to drive his life even when he met his brothers during a severe famine. Paul, who was in prison while writing Philippians, did not allow bitterness to drive his life. Instead, he was content and left us some practical steps that we can embrace in our effort to be content.

**1. I desire to be content in the Lord (v. 10)**

Context is key to understanding this passage. Paul was giving thanks to the church family for the kindness they had shown him while imprisoned for the gospel (1:3-7). He is concluding his message to the church family by indicating that he had rejoiced in the Lord greatly because of their care for him.

If we are going to forgo bitterness and embrace contentment, it is paramount that we rejoice in the Lord. The way Paul wrote this shows an action that took place in the past and yet still had implications for his future. Paul was giving testimony to his rejoicing in the Lord and this action was still having impact upon his life. His rejoicing was not over his current residence as he was in jail. His rejoicing was over the love that the church family was showing him during his imprisonment. Paul was focused on the Lord and not his living condition and this led to contentment.

**2. I desire to be content no matter the circumstances (v. 11)**

Let’s be honest, our circumstances can be extremely difficult on occasion. We might be working for someone that is opposed to our faith and belittles us every chance he gets. You could have just received bad news from the doctor and hard decisions need to be made. The list of negative circumstances is truly endless.

Paul would understand. He was in jail for proclaiming the gospel. He knew that God had called him to share the good news of Jesus Christ. He was faithful to this calling, and it

landed him in prison. It would have been easy to become bitter and angry with God. But, he said, "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself." How was he able to do this? He was focused on the Lord and not his circumstances. No, this is not easy, but we are able to do this when we see that God is providing for us no matter the circumstances.

**3. I desire to be content in God's provision (v. 12)**

How much is enough? Many might answer, just a little bit more. How much money is enough? Just one dollar more. How much food is enough? Just a little more in the refrigerator and I will be satisfied. How many toys are enough? I just need a few more and then I will be okay.

Feeling a lack of contentment is all too normal, no matter our age or stage of life. If, however, we would see things through God's eyes, we would be more apt to find the contentment we desire. Paul had lacked basic necessities and experienced abundance. He had been hungry and well feed. In and through all of this, he had learned the secret of being content. This contentment was not based on what he had or did not have. Instead, it was based on knowing that God had been and would continue to be faithful to meet his needs. Paul chose to focus on the provisions that God had given and not on the things that he may have wanted.

**4. I desire to be content in God's strength (v. 13-14)**

Verse 13 is not a verse that says I can win this ballgame or close the biggest deal in the history of the company. Instead, it is a verse that indicates trust in the Father who is above and beyond our circumstances. It is a passage of great hope in that it points to His goodness and grace no matter what we might be experiencing at any given moment.

Paul clearly articulated that he could do all things through God's strength even in extreme hardship. He was encouraging the church at Philippi. He was not going to let his negative situation be cause for discouragement. Instead, he testified to God's goodness and strength, and we are still being impacted by his testimony today. Could the same be said of us today? Are we focused upon what we perceive to be negative circumstances and allowing bitterness to grow in our lives or are we focused on a loving Father who is greater than our circumstances?

**Conclusion:** Bitterness and contentment are both choices. We can focus on our bad circumstances and become bitter to God and hostile to those around us. Or we can rejoice in the Lord greatly as Paul did and thereby encouraged others no matter the circumstances. The choice is ours. The only way, however, to be able to truly rejoice in the Lord is to know Him personally. If we do not have this relationship, bitterness is the natural response to this life. Paul had that relationship and was able to rejoice. Can you say that same thing? If not, do not leave today with a relationship with Him. When you see things through His eyes, you could end up thanking Him for the hardship and not cursing Him.

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