

Contentment
Serve Strong Series Week 2
Philippians 2:1-11
May 6, 2018

Welcome/intro/vision

Week two in a series of messages called “Serve Strong” And here’s the tension or issue we’re going to drill down into:

Most of us have this **conflicted relationship with the whole idea of serving**
whether you’re a Christian/church person or not, most of us have one of these 3 relationships with serving

A very small percentage of us are **naturally gifted servers**
do you know someone who’s a natural at serving? I’m not one of them, but I’ve known a couple--they’re wonderfully kind people, aren’t they?
If you’re one of these people, thank you for how you serve others so naturally and graciously, it makes the world come more alive around you. Thank you.

That’s one extreme, but here’s the OTHER extreme: some of you straight up think serving is weakness. One author I read researched how different people related to the world around them

And for some of you the way you were raised or how you think about it, there’s two types of people in the world: there are **Vikings and there are Victims**

And you’re either the Viking who’s winning or you’re the Victim who’s losing.

And serving isn’t what Vikings do! Winners in life aren’t the ones who serve, victims serve

you work hard or you hustle and make it so that you don’t HAVE to serve ANYONE! Tend to be guarded and suspicious

If you’ve got a worldview that’s essentially got just those two categories: Vikings or Victims, serving doesn’t make any sense.

Some of you are likely Vikings or Victims kind of people and/or you know someone who’s had a Vikings or Victims—co-worker, boss, maybe raised in a Viking or Victim home

So we’ve got a small percentage of natural servers, we’ve got a percentage of us who are Vikings or Victims people

And then there’s the rest of us for whom serving comes under the category of ‘**shoulds and oughts**’

You watched enough Sesame Street as a kid or maybe went to church and you know I SHOULD serve others. I know it's kind of a good thing that I OUGHT to do.

But there's only so many hours in the day and there are so many needs out there in the world
Plus some of us have gotten burned out or exhausted in our efforts to serve or meet needs

Or maybe we felt like someone took advantage of us along the way
Or maybe we're just really, really busy and who's got time with everything else you've already got on your schedule?

And into this mix of people over the next couple of weeks we're going to throw out a service opportunity that we do twice a year around here called "Chatham Serves"

Where, as we mentioned before, instead of our typical worship service, we line up a bunch of service projects and invite you to sign up and serve somewhere

Some of you gifted servers LOVE this Sunday, you wish we did this every single week.

Others of you, more Vikings or Victims people, you roll your eyes and say dismiss this entirely, who'd want to get up on a Sunday morning to go do a bunch of do-gooder service projects for people you don't know even if they DESERVE it or not?!?

And then for a good number of the should and ought folks, we're a little annoyed by this whole thing

we know we SHOULD do this, we're glad in THEORY our church does this, we might even tell our friends about this cool thing our church does when we cancel the normal service and go out and serve

but when it comes right down to it, it's not convenient, it's work, we're not always sure where we fit, maybe we don't have tons of handyman or handywoman skills—ugh! Chatham Serves!

For these next couple of weeks, we're going to invite everyone into a richer, more rooted, more life-giving framework to think about serving

And then we're going to invite everyone who will be here on May 20th to jump in on Chatham Serves and serve with great joy

And what we're going to see as we look at the Jesus-way of serving is this principle that runs all throughout his life and throughout all the writings of the Scriptures:

In Jesus's kingdom, YOU HAVE TO BE STRONG TO SERVE.

And so what the Scriptures tell us is that God GIVES us his strength, tremendous resources. He positions us in a place of abundance of grace and security and life and love

And then he looks at you and he looks at me and says, "You have been taken care of in MY strength. Now I want you to step in and SERVE"

This is particularly important for us to hear as today we wrestle with one of the biggest obstacles to many of us serving: we're just exhausted and overwhelmed with our own lives, who's got time to serve?

Ever felt that? I totally have! I'm too exhausted and overwhelmed with the stuff I've already got on my plate and so I don't have time to go out of my way to help someone else

Now sometimes this is totally true! We all need to have wise boundaries and some of us struggle to say 'no' to anything. There is a time to say 'I just can't do that right now'

But sometimes how we GOT to that place of exhaustion and being overwhelmed stems from a deeper place in our hearts.

Sometimes we're exhausted and overwhelmed *because our anxieties and/or ambitions* have driven us to ridiculousness: ridiculous schedules. Ridiculous priorities. Ridiculous decisions that we sometimes look back on and regret.

When ANXIETY OR AMBITION is ruling in our hearts, SERVING OTHERS is going to be hard to do

And that deeper heart work over overthrowing anxiety and ambition is what we're going to go to work on today.

If you've got a Bible turn to Philippians 4. If you're brand new to the Bible, so glad you're here, much of the New Testament is a collection of letters written to brand new churches and brand new Christians who are trying to work out and understand faith as best they can

Paul is the author of this letter, he wrote most of the letters we have in the New Testament, and he's writing to his friends in Philippi and he's in jail for his faith while writing this

We're dropping down in this letter towards the end of it and what you discover as you're reading is this is really a thank you letter. The Philippians have sent Paul some money and he's thanking them for what they've done for him

Here's what he writes in Philippians 4

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.

In other words, thanks so much for your gift. I knew that you had my back the whole time, but now you've had opportunity to demonstrate it

¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 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, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Over the past couple of years there has been a glut of research and studies and surveys around how social media affects our level of happiness

And overwhelmingly, the studies all show that increased use of social media doesn't improve our mood it depresses us

In fact, the more time people typically spend on social media, the more likely it is that they battle depression and/or anxiety

Two key dynamics seem to be in play: one is that you're looking at other people's highlight reels while you live your normal life

At any given moment on your social media newsfeed, there's going to be someone doing something cool that you wish you could do.

You compare your drab life to this patch-work of awesomeness happening all around you and your life stinks!

The second dynamic at work is the contentiousness of the interactions on social media.

There is so much anger and animosity and vitriol happening at any given moment, especially in our hype-politicized era, that it doesn't take long for you to find someone who pushes your buttons with their posts!

So you see that one post that pushed your buttons

And an hour later you realize you've spent the last hour walking around having angry conversations in your head with someone you haven't actually talked to since middle school

Anxiety, depression, and contentiousness mark much of how we think and how we live and how we relate to one another in our social media age

And into this storm of toxic emotions and interactions, the Scriptures throw us a lifeline with these little sentences—this morning, if you know that your life is mostly marked with disappointment or discontent, today is your day, this is your moment

these verses are an invitation into a deeper, more powerful, more robust life that is not hooked into all of that stuff

And the key word here that Paul uses twice is CONTENT. Would you read this with me together?

I have learned to be CONTENT whatever the circumstances. 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, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Can you imagine YOU being able to write THIS about YOURSELF? Without lying?

What if this actually described you, your inner life, who you were all the way down to the core?

No matter what the circumstances, plenty or want, every situation, fed or hungry, appetites met or not met,

Physical or emotional wants or desires satisfied or not really fully satisfied, I'm okay.

Most of us probably can't say this yet, can't say this now

but to start with we have to realize CONTENTEDNESS IS possible

and we have to be willing to say that this way of life would be better than what I'm currently living and would be worth the sacrifices I'd have to make to get there

Because while content is the key adjective here that Paul says describes his emotional center, there's a key verb that he uses as well, and that verb is this one: LEARNED

Twice Paul says that he's content, but TWICE Paul says this isn't something that came naturally to me, twice he says that he absolutely had to learn how to do this

When you read Paul's back story, you get the picture that he used to be a lot like some of us—he was ambitious, proud, striving, climbing the corporate ladder, making a name for himself

There are many words that could have described what Paul was like before he met Jesus, but CONTENT was *not* one of them

He was a striver, driven—he's an intense dude his whole life!

And then he had a dramatic encounter with Jesus. And that's what changed everything not only about his career path, it changed everything about his heart, too

And so after Paul met Jesus, he went to work serving others when before his life was mostly built around serving himself and serving his own agendas

And at the same time, Paul went to work on his inner world so that he might LEARN a contentedness that the world couldn't touch

And from that place of strength, from that place of contentedness, Paul was positioned to be able to look up and see others and serve them with joy and freedom and confidence

Because if you're just generally struggling with anxiety or feeling churned up inside, discontent and feeling generally dis-satisfied with life

Who's needs, wants, opinions and hurts are you paying most attention to? Your own!

Contentedness is God leading us to the firm and solid place that allows us to live with our eyes up and out rather than inward and down. (2x)

This place of contentedness is available to us because God knows that we have to be strong to serve.

But we have to learn it, it doesn't come naturally to almost any of us.

And the place where we're invited to learn it is the same place that Paul did: ¹³ ***I can do all this through him who gives me strength.***

Every job has busier seasons and this has been a really intense couple of weeks here at the church.

Just a lot going on behind the scenes to get some things in place, especially a staff hiring process

Tuesday morning this past week I woke up and it was like before my feet hit the floor the conversation in my head was already running at warp speed about the things that needed to happen that day and some decisions that needed to be made

Ever have one of those kinds of days?

Well I did what I do most days of the week, I got my Bible and my journal and I went out on our little back porch

My daily lesson the same school of contentedness that Paul trained in, bringing all that stuff to Jesus

But that particular morning, as I went out to the back porch and sat down, I had a powerful sense that Jesus was there already, that he was waiting for me

And in that moment, I realized that as important as the things I was thinking about were, and they were

The most important thing I could do in that moment was simply receive the presence of Christ and let his strength and his contentment and his power and grace and wisdom wash all over me and over these things I needed to do and figure out

And so instead of coming into prayer with all these things that I needed Jesus to do something about, I started with a simple prayer of surrender and submission:

Jesus, you are here. And I delight to know you're here. And I submit myself and my stuff to you, and I surrender it all to you. Take it, I'd rather have you at the center of my life than my problems or even my solutions.

I released and surrendered this challenges and stresses of the day to Jesus. And in that exchange, I felt this wave of relief and peace wash over me. Contentedness. Right there in that moment

This whole idea of surrender or detachment from things is common across lots of spiritual practices and religions and it's good and wise and important

But what's unique about the Jesus way of approaching things is detachment is not the goal. Merely letting go of things is not the final goal.

Detachment from things is a means to a bigger end: that we might ATTACH to Jesus, who is the source of all joy, the source of all contentment, the source of all peace

We say NO to the issues or concerns or worries or appetites or ambitions that would sink their hooks into us and over-run us and run our lives

In order to say a much bigger and larger YES to Jesus, the one who invented happiness, the one who created laughter, the one who is always perfectly content and who gladly shares his contentment with all who will trust in him to do so

SG this past week talking about this and someone described it as a “deep knowing”—it is well with my soul, it shall be well with my soul, all shall be well with my soul

And so on my back porch Tuesday morning, I released my churn, surrendered it all to him, laid it down at his feet, and that freed me to have open hands to receive HIM at the center of my life

And after just 30 minutes or so at the feet of my teacher in the school of contentedness, I left my back porch ready to do all that I needed to do from a more contented space

Not engaging it from a place of anxiety or ambition, but from a deep place of contentedness

And from that place of contentedness, I was not only more clear-headed and able to do my own work and tasks with more joy

I was ALSO wasn't just walking through my day with my eyes downward and inward, I was able to look up and out, more able to serve others

On Tuesday mornings I hit the coffee shop at the Goat over in Fearington Village to get some uninterrupted work done. Fearington has a huge retiree community,

And every Tuesday morning there's a table of slightly grumpy old dudes and one hilarious lady who sit down and gather over newspapers to complain about the government full-time

One litmus test of my settledness and contentedness meter is I will often check in to ask what they're grouching about that day and chat for a few minutes

But when I'm stressed and anxious and busy, I just wave from afar. Which is what I've been doing the past 2-3 weeks, just too much going on

But after spending 30 minutes or so working out in my contentedness gym, I was able to be at peace enough to stop through and say hello

Turns out, one of them had a nasty fall, all bruised up. Able to communicate sympathy and empathy, and then as I was sitting down at my seat remembered to pray for healing

A small thing, but it was a sign of a healthier me that I was able to pray for a healthier her.

We have to LEARN contentment in part because our instincts are all wrong: we think contentment is the result of circumstances

if I had the right job, the right spouse, the right kids, the right house, the right car, if I caught the right break THEN I'd be content

But what Jesus shows us and what Paul echoes here is that contentment is not found in external props but an internal surrender

And so we have to re-train and re-tool our hearts and minds when if we want to get to a place of real contentment, because it's never found on the outside

If we were sitting at a coffee shop, I'd pull out a napkin and draw this, let's see if we can unpack this a bit:

Natural State (Discontentedness through variety of factors)

Meet **Jesus [Cross here]**

invites us **up this path [arrow up] of learning** up to **contentment**—and we learn contentment through the work of **surrendering prayer**

Which frees us to live with our eyes up and out **[arrow out]** that we might **serve**

This is how we typically map the journey to contentment that frees us up to serve

But there's another way that we can get there that we need to employ from time to time

And that is this path to contentment that leads to serving is sometimes walked by **servicing**

Have you ever been too busy and stressed to serve, you did it anyway, and you ended up in this place called contentment?

Not always, not perfectly. But sometimes the way you get to contentment that leads to a life of serving is by of prayerful surrender

sometimes you to contentment by **surrender through serving**—an act of service or thoughtfulness or kindness whereby you surrender some of your time, energies and attentions and give them to someone else

Sometimes you have to serve first, the contentment comes after, which then frees you up to be a person who is following in the Jesus way into serving freely and with joy

The path of Jesus leads us to the mountain-top of contentment, but the way to get there in his strength is going to require NOT getting but releasing

The path to getting to contentment is going to require surrender at some level: a prayerful surrender, a serving surrender, or maybe most frequently both,

Either way, what it is that moves all of this from a temporary feeling to a permanent state of being is that it's rooted right here, in the person and love of Christ.

Because in his kingdom, you have got to be strong to serve. So he calls us to serve strong and then he gives us a path to do so—a path that leads to HIS strength

so that along with Paul we might be able to say “I’ve learned the secret to being content in ANY situation—it’s Christ who gives me strength to be content and stay content”

But that path runs a little counter-intuitive. Contentedness as it turns out isn’t achieved through acquisition

You can’t merger and acquisition your way into contentedness, whether it’s position or status or money or stuff or experiences, those are all fleeting and passing

The path to real contentedness is found in surrender—a prayerful surrender, a serving surrender, both of those at various times and various points in our lives will be the key to finding a contentedness that will last

And so as we close this morning, your **Take-WITH** for this week:

What kind of surrender do you need to embrace this week to learn contentedness in order to serve strong?

-Prayerful surrender? Serving Surrender? Both?

This week, I want to invite you into the wonderful, counter-intuitive, Jesus-way path of contentment

In part so that busyness or anxiety or ambitions wouldn’t keep you from living the life that you and I were made to live—a life of serving

And from that we want to invite you to join this church community as we sign up for and engage with **Chatham Serves**: sign-ups in the lobby today, live right now at ChathamServes.org

Look, people TALK about serving the community ALL THE TIME! There’s a pandemic of people who are all talk and no action—this is especially true in churches, isn’t it?

This is a tangible way for us as a church to not just TALK about loving our neighbor BUT TO ACTUALLY DO IT—for us walk the path of Christ with his strength to contentment

And so this invite all of us to walk in the way of surrender in order to be drawing on all the rich resources of Christ so that we are not just exhausting ourselves in service

But so that we’re full to the brim with the love and power and wonder of God—that we might be CONTENT

THEN, with those resources and that mindset, we want to be people who are set free to serve strong, just like Jesus, and we’re going to invite you to jump in and serve

Serving from a deep place of contentment and serving that LEADS TO a deep place of contentment

COMMUNION TRANSITION: It's Jesus's surrender that we celebrate now as we take communion...