

A Content Attitude

Philippians 4

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Getting Started

In the introduction to this series, Dave said, “Having the right attitude is so important, because our mindsets dictate how we see life, how we view the circumstances that come our way. One person can go through a pleasant circumstance and be thrilled; another can go through the same and be indifferent. One can go through a tough circumstance and be resilient; another, overwhelmed.”

Below is the story of a man named Horatio Spafford who lived in the 1800’s. Notice how he responded to his tough circumstances.

As a young man, Spafford had established a successful legal practice in Chicago. Some months prior to the Chicago fire of 1871, he had invested heavily in real estate on the shore of Lake Michigan, and his holdings were wiped out by the disaster. Desiring a rest for his wife and four daughters as well as wishing to support some Christian ministry happening at the time, he planned a European trip for his family in November of 1873. Due to unexpected last minutes business developments, he had to remain in Chicago, but sent his wife and four daughters on the boat as scheduled. He expected to follow in a few days.

On November 22, the ship was struck and sank in 12 minutes. Several days later the survivors finally landed in Wales, and Mrs. Spafford cabled her husband, “Saved alone.” Shortly afterward he left by ship to join his bereaved wife. It is thought that in the sea near the area where his four daughters had drowned, Spafford penned the text that so significantly described his own personal grief: “When sorrows like sea billows roll...”¹

Take a moment to read (or sing) through the first two verses of the hymn that Horatio wrote on that ship: “It is well with my soul.”

*When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll,
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, ‘It is well, it is well with my soul.’
It is well with my soul. It is well with my soul.*

*Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, let this blest assurance control
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate and hath shed his own blood for my soul.
It is well with my soul. It is well with my soul.*

1. What stands out to you from the story or hymn?
2. How do the words of verse 2 explain and support the words of verse 1?

Exploring Scripture

Read Philippians 4

¹ Kenneth W. Osbeck, *101 Hymn Stories* (Kregel Publications, 1982) 127.

1. In verse 11, Paul tells the Philippians that he has learned to be content.
 - a. What does contentment look like to you?
 - b. Do you think some people are just more naturally contented than others? Why or why not?

2. Notice verse 13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."
 - a. This verse is often quoted by itself. If possible, give an example of a situation where you used this verse or heard someone else apply it.
 - b. Putting the verse in Biblical context, how does that color the meaning? Does it support how it was used in your answer to 2a?
 - c. Why might Christ's strength be the secret to contentedness?

3. Look back at verses 4-9. If we were to follow Paul's commands to rejoice, be gentle, pray, be thankful, think about true and honorable things, etc., how could that impact our ability to be content?

Application

4. When Paul compares having plenty and being in want he uses the example of food – being well fed and going hungry.
 - a. Think back to Horatio Spafford. What were some examples of plenty and want in his life?
 - b. What are some other areas of life where we can experience plenty or want? (Brainstorm as many as you can and write them down because you will need the list for the next question.)

5. Take about two minutes on your own to answer to following.
 - a. Working from the list your group just created, reflect on any places in your life where you are struggling with contentment.
 - b. Ask God to reveal the causes of that struggle. Write down what comes to mind.

6. As a small group or in groups of 2-3 spend some time in prayer.
 - a. Share with each other your answers to the previous question.
 - b. Pray for one another, asking God to bring whatever is needed into your life that will strengthen you (Phil. 4:13) and teach you contentedness.