

Learning Contentment

**“I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content”
(Phil. 4:11)**

Little children are born selfish and ignorant. Initially they have little or no awareness of anyone's needs but their own. The infant does not automatically think how tired mommy is, or how little sleep she has had. They do not automatically want to share their toys, or consider the needs of brothers and sisters. Children must be taught to think of others.

I am told that the newborn infant has only two fears, the fear of falling, and the fear of loud noises. In the course of a normal life they will learn 5,000 other fears. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. This too is something every child need to learn in order to have a happy life and a healthy future.

Christianity is itself a learning process. Paul wrote: **“This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ;” (Eph 4:17-20)**

Paul's “learning” of Christ enabled him to find contentment wherever he was. His letter to the church in Philippi is a “prison letter.” His bonds in Christ, however, did not deter him from happiness. He had learned in whatsoever state he was to be content. He knew how to be abased, and he also knew how to abound. He had learned to honour Christ when he was full, and also when he was hungry. He had learned that he could do all things through Christ who strengthened him.

Acts 16 provides a personal vignette of Paul that speaks volumes. He had been unjustly beaten and cast into prison. The jailer had thrust he and Silas into the inner prison and placed their feet in the stocks for safe keeping. At midnight, however, Paul and Silas were singing praises to God (Acts 16:25.) This amazing story provides clear insight into the “contentment” Paul had learned. In Christ he could die happier than others could live.

It is proverbial that we crawl before we walk, and walk before we run. There was a time when we could neither walk, nor talk, and now we can do both activities in our sleep. Life is a learning experience. We can learn contentment in much the same way. At first it will not be easy, but ultimately it can become our very nature.

Our first lessons in gratitude involve thanksgiving for food and favours bestowed upon us by others. Next we can grow to the place where we are thankful for blessings that are spiritual and eternal. Ultimately we can learn to give thanks in everything (1 Thess. 5:18.) We need to be constantly reminded, however, that “learning Christ” is a spiritual experience that must be accompanied by spiritual power.

Here are several truths that are foundational to a life of gratitude:

1. First we need to learn that God is good, and all things work together for good to those that love God and are called according to His purpose.
2. Secondly, it is helpful to learn that there has no temptation taken us but such as is common to man. God is faithful, and will not allow us to be tempted above what we are able, but will with every temptation also provide a means of escape that we may be able to bear it (1 Cor. 10:13.)
3. In the third place we can learn that nothing can happen to us without the specific permission of God. The story of Job is an interesting case in point. The devil could not touch his wealth, his family, or his health without permission from God (See Job. 1-2)
4. In the fourth place we can learn that He that is within us is greater than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4,) and that when we resist the devil he will flee from us.
5. Finally, we can learn that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus

our Lord (Rom. 8:38-39.) Jesus Christ Himself has promised never to leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5.

These are just a few of the exceeding great and precious promises which we can “learn” in Christ (2 Pet. 1:4.)