



9.21.25...The Secret of Contentment

God of Contentment and Peace, as we engage with Your word, help us to listen to one another, our own hearts and especially to you.

Quiet in us all the other voices and pressures we hear and feel, to know you are near and supplying for all our needs, which quickens us to generously bless others. Amen.

A month ago, I enjoyed a week of vacation. I didn't stay anywhere fancy or go anyplace exotic—I was trying to keep expenses down. The first two days, I felt restless. The ragweed was causing my allergies to flare up, and it felt like I had a bad cold. Ugh!

With my head pounding, I kept fretting that I was going to be sick all week, about emails piling up, and about how this was not the “perfect” start to my vacation that I had planned.

But one evening, something shifted. I really noticed my cats, just sitting and being content. I noticed how beautifully the sky was unfolding—soft pinks and oranges giving way to another noticing. I noticed the cool evening air, reminding me that my favorite season was coming soon.

At some point, I also realized my phone wasn't in my hand for the first time all day. I wasn't worrying about work or comparing my little staycation to someone else's big trip. I wasn't wishing for anything more. My brain had quieted down.

I felt content—fully present, at ease, peaceful, grateful for what was right in front of me. It wasn't because everything was perfect or because I

had everything I wanted, but because I recognized the gift of enough. And I finished out my vacation with days that felt calm and full.

That evening reminded me of Paul's words in Philippians chapter 4, verse 11.

**“I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.”**

Contentment came when I stopped looking elsewhere, slowed down and embraced the blessings God had already given me.

Just like Paul, I am learning to be more content. I haven't arrived. I still have more to learn and practice. But I might be getting better at it—and practicing contentment is lovely.

I think many of us know being discontented. We know that restless feeling—when things don't go the way we want, or when our minds just won't stop racing.

And yet, I wonder if you've ever had a moment, maybe unexpected, when peace found you in the ordinary? When was the last time you experienced being really okay, content even, with where you were in life?

Contentment does not come naturally to me—and maybe it doesn't to you either. We live in a world that constantly tells us to want more, do more, be more.

That's probably why I resonate with this poem by Wendell Berry, who names his own struggles with contentment:

### **The Want of Peace**

All goes back to the earth,  
and so I do not desire  
pride of excess or power,  
but the contentments made  
by men who have had little:  
the fisherman's silence  
receiving the river's grace,  
the gardner's musing on rows.

I lack the peace of simple things.  
I am never wholly in place.  
I find no peace or grace.  
We sell the world to buy fire,  
our way lighted by burning men,  
and that has bent my mind  
and made me think of darkness  
and wish for the dumb life of roots.

Berry names the restlessness I felt at the start of my vacation. I lacked **“the peace of simple things,”** still winding down from work.

I love his description of the **“fisherman’s silence receiving the river’s grace,”** because I grew up on a lake fishing and love kayaking, and I know the grace water gives.

Berry contrasts the striving that is so constant in our world with the rootedness of creation—a good source of contentment. We do, as he says, **“sell the world to buy fire,”** chasing after things that seem exciting but can never satisfy for long.

And we learn, real peace is found in **“the dumb life of roots”**—the quiet contentedness of resting in God and in nature.

Paul, in our passage from Philippians, reminds us that contentment is something we can learn and grow in.

So, let me ask you: Are you content? If so, what fosters that contentment in you? If not, what do you think would help you find it?

Does your contentment rise and fall? Are you aware of what causes those ups and downs?

I’ll admit that sometimes, at a restaurant when I see the waitress carrying someone else’s dinner by...I think, “Oh, I should have gotten that!”

Or other people’s vacation pictures on Facebook.

Or finding that all my Oreos were eaten at our last potluck. You know who you are.

I can feel my level of discontentment rising. Pretty much anything can trigger me. Maybe you are thinking about your own triggers...?

But here's the good news: there is a secret to contentment. Not a secret as in something hidden, but wisdom that Paul had to learn the hard way.

Paul discovered that contentment is not dependent on circumstances but on deeper truths.

For Paul, the secret is not about *what* he had but *who* he had—his friendship with Christ. Paul learned the faithful presence of Jesus brings peace, provision, and joy in every situation.

Remember he was writing this in prison, in the shadow of a death sentence.

Contentment can feel like a far-off dream, when we look around and the world seems to weigh so heavily upon us. And yet, the apostle Paul speaks of a secret.

Not so much a secret as lived experience. More like wisdom on contentment that has been tested and tried, through the many difficulties Paul had to face...including hunger, torture, shipwrecks, imprisonment.

Paul experienced a type of contentment not found in wealth or success, but on a deeper way of viewing life.

The secret of contentment is not complicated: we don't face life alone. Our truest, deepest, strongest source of contentment flows from looking to Jesus, from our relationship with the Lord.

With Christ, over time, our perspective changes, we see abundance and the fullness of life that God intends for us.

John Wesley picked up on this same truth when he preached about money. In his sermon *On the Use of Money*, he encouraged his listeners to “save all you can”.

But the goal was not to hoard wealth, it was to live simply so that we can maximize the impact our resources have on others.

Here is one quote from Wesley’s sermon, “*Money is a precious gift. It should not be wasted on trivialities...be content with simple things that your body needs. ... The rest should be distributed in order to bring glory to God.*”

Wesley’s teaching convicted me and I felt called to make some simple changes.

First, I stopped highlighting my hair. It was expensive. Every time I saw the color swirl down the drain after washing my hair, I thought of Wesley’s challenge.

Second, I bought a coffee maker to cut back on specialty drinks.

Third, I began giving consistently to UMCOR.

These are not prescriptions for you, but they’ve been ways God has taught me contentment and simplicity. I really thought I was going to die when I stopped coloring the grey.

And now, I am open to God showing me more ways to live simply!

I’m also excited for the work our Adult Discipleship Team wants to do around homelessness in Buffalo. Supporting those efforts is another way we can live simply, love generously, and lessen the distress of those in need.

I believe Paul’s teaching here in Philippians can help us learn what it really means to be content, live simply and grow in generosity.

Paul’s teaching helps us see that contentment leads us to be outwardly focused and generous.

Earlier in chapter 4, Paul urges “U O Dia” and “Sin tea chee” to reconcile and “be of the same mind in the Lord.” He knew that if they found

contentment in Jesus, they could get back to the real task at hand, focusing on blessing others.

Paul also gives us practical steps for growing in contentment. In verses 4 through 9, he encourages us to rejoice, be gentle, not be anxious, be grateful, and think on good things.

Any one of these practices—or all of them together—can help cultivate a “bumper crop” of contentment within us.

And overflowing in contentment causing us to spill over into joyful generosity!

And then Paul shares his own testimony, his own story and experience with Jesus:

*“I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 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 all this through him who gives me strength.”*

Did you hear the secret? The secret is not gritting our teeth or pretending everything is fine. Far from it. The secret is Jesus. Paul found strength to be content because Christ gave it to him. And Christ offers us that same strength.

Trusting in Jesus doesn't mean life will be easy. It doesn't mean all our struggles will vanish. But it does mean that whatever we face, Jesus will be with us. And Jesus will give us the grace and strength we need to experience deep contentment.

Paul closes with a bold promise in verse 19: *“And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”*

Friends, Paul's words remind us that when we learn to live from that place of contentment in God, we begin to see our resources differently. Instead of chasing after “more,” we find joy in sharing what we already have.

Wesley's words on contentment and giving might be summarized, "Live simply so that others may simply live." That is the gift of contentment, it frees us from restlessness and invites us into helping others.

When our lives are rooted in Christ, we discover that what we have is often more than enough to bless others.

As I wrap up, I invite you to consider Paul's call to contentment and Wesley's challenge in saving and giving, to remember we are halfway through our stewardship campaign.

I encourage you to use our remaining couple of weeks, to reflect on how we can faithfully use all that God has entrusted to us to bless others. In thinking creatively about giving of your money, your spiritual gifts, your time and energy...here at BUMC.

Because in our intentional giving, we declare: "*Lord, you are enough. What you've given me is enough. And I want to use it bless others.*" Amen.

### **Time of Reflection**

As we pause and prepare to respond to God's Word, take a moment to breathe deeply and rest in His presence. Let these questions guide your reflection:

1. Do you have a desire similar to Berry's, do you "wish for the dumb life of roots?" Where might Christ be inviting you to learn contentment this week?
2. Or what small practice could help you slow down, rest in His presence, and discover the gift of enough?