

“The Secret”

(Phil. 4:10-12)

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I. Introduction

A. My visit to Auschwitz

1. Reflections on my visit
 - a. How and why I went there
 - b. *“Work will make you free”*
 - c. What things were like 64 years ago
2. Where was God in all of this?
3. The attitude of the prisoners
 - a. Jewish men in San Diego
4. Victor Frankl’s book *Man’s Search for Meaning*

From his own death camp observations, he documented the amazing coping powers of humans to retain inner freedom. He wrote:

“We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last pieces of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”

B. How’s your attitude during these tough times?

1. If you’re listening to the news at all...
 - a. A time of anxiety and turmoil
 - b. No hope for relief any time soon
 - c. Does God know....or care?

- d. Why doesn't He do something?
- 2. Is it affecting your attitude?
 - a. Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you respond
 - b. It's your attitude...not your achievements...that will give you happiness (Maxwell)
 - c. Are you feeling contentment?
 - d. How can you in times like this?
- 3. The secret is hinted at in Philippians 4:12
 - a. So important for us in 2009

"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. Philippians 4:12
 - b. So what is the secret???

C. By the way...these are times of great opportunity

- 1. *"Times of calamity and distress have always been producers of the greatest men. The hardest of steel is produced from the hottest fire"*
(Andy Andrews)
- 2. *"When God wants to send you a gift, he wraps it up in a problem; and the bigger the gift that God sends you, the bigger the problem."*
(Norman Vincent Peale)
- 3. How will you respond to adversity?

C. Next week

- 1. Will cover the rest of verse 8 and 9
- 2. A special "Sunday of Praise"
 - a. 2nd Anniversary of a special day

D. We're wrapping up the book of Philippians

- 1. Written by Paul while he was a prisoner in Rome

- a. Under tough circumstances
- 2. A letter to the church at Philippi
 - a. He was the “founding pastor”
 - b. Letter filled with rejoicing
- 3. Closes with a “thank you”
 - a. Their timely gift of money (also sent Epaphroditus to help him)
- 4. You might have expected to hear:
 - a. Bitterness over his condition
 - 1. Deserted by former friends
 - 2. Falsely accused
 - b. Questioning where God was
 - c. Discontentment over his “lost” years
 - d. Resentment over his poverty
- 6. But what we see is CONTENTMENT!!!
- 8. Paul discovered a secret...and shares it with us today
- 9. Outline of Philippians 4:10-13
 - a. *God’s Providence (v.10)*
 - b. *God’s Provision (v.11)*
 - c. *God’s Promise (v.12-13)*

II. Text

A. God’s Providence (v. 10)

- 1. God works in mysterious ways

a. Miracles

1. When God overrules the natural laws He has established
2. When God interjects the supernatural
 - a. Very rarely done

b. Providence

1. When God orchestrates the daily circumstances of your life
 - a. The people you meet
 - *Funeral...seven sisters
 - b. Where you were born
 - c. Your physical abilities
 - d. The ordinary circumstances of your life

2. Contentment comes when we begin to recognize the providence of God in the daily circumstances of our lives

3. When we recognize that they are intended for “our growth and His glory”

2. Paul recognized God’s providence in an event that occurred

- a. Philippians 4:10

(10) I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.

- b. A surprise gift from the church

3. Paul had some serious financial needs while in Rome

- a. This is the church that came through during his darkest hour

1. Even though it had been 10 years since their last gift!!!

- b. The “**at last**” is not meant to be critical

- c. Their care was “**renewed**”

1. A horticultural term
2. A flower blooming again at just the right time
- d. It came just when he needed it
- e. He wasn't worried

Paul knew the secrets to contentment during adversity:

Secret #1 *God knows what's best for you*

- a. Paul had confidence in God's ability to order his affairs
 1. He didn't have to worry—God would take care of his needs
- b. The struggles you are facing
 1. He knows you're laid off
 2. He knows your 401k is worth half
 3. He knows your medical condition
- c. "Discontentment" is the opposite of "Contentment"
 1. Unwilling to wait for God to move
 2. Demonstrates a lack of trust in God
 - a. To achieve His plans for your life
 - b. For YOUR growth...and HIS glory
- e. Earlier we sang "These are the days of Elijah"
 1. The story of Elijah
 - *by the Brook Cherith
 2. Days of loneliness and deprivation
 - *waiting for God to move
 3. Days of severe depression

*felt all alone

4. But through it all....Elijah grew and God got the glory

Secret #2 *God cares deeply about you and your struggles*

- a. He loves you so much
- b. Parents and their new babies
 - 1. Baby dedication in two weeks
 - 2. Parents' love for their babies
 - 3. Their desire for them to grow strong
 - 4. Making tough decisions
- c. God loves us even more
 - 1. He never stops caring
- d. The importance of going through tough times
 - 1. ***Human beings are like tea bags. You don't know how strong they are until they get into hot water***
 - 2. ***When God needs to accomplish an impossible task, He finds an impossible person and crushes him***
- d. God sees the big picture
 - 1. We only see 2009
 - 2. He knows what you need to learn for the future

Secret #3 *God's timing is always right on schedule*

- a. Paul didn't know God was speaking to somebody about his need
 - 1. I love God-driven surprises
 - 2. When we've done all we can
- b. God's timing in your life

1. To achieve His plans
2. There's always a reason He allows it

B. God's Provision (v. 11)

(11) I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

- a. Paul had so little
 1. Just the bare necessities of life
- b. Yet he says he has no need
 1. Had all he needed
 2. He was content with whatever God had provided
- c. Our culture struggles with contentment
 1. Want to be
 - a. Richer
 - b. Thinner
 - c. Prettier
 - d. Younger
 2. Trying to understand Jerry
- d. We want what others have
 1. Stirs discontentment
- e. By the way...this is not an excuse for laziness

Secret #4 *God's favor doesn't always mean abundance*

- a. The emergence of the "Health and Wealth Gospel"
 1. "Name it...claim it"

2. Viewed as a sign of *God's favor*
- b. If that's the case, then Paul missed the boat
 1. Had nothing
 2. But had contentment
 - c. However those with abundance may also be in God's favor
 1. Paul said he's known both wealth and poverty
 2. Contented in both

Secret #5 *The tougher the struggle, the greater the growth*

- a. When there is no other place to turn
 1. Praying for jobs
 2. Praying for giving to the church

*next Sunday's time of praise
- b. The times when we get to *experience* his care and provision
 1. Not just read about it
 2. *Pain is God's megaphone...He whispers to us in our pleasure and shouts to us in our suffering*
- c. We develop patience
- d. We learn to wait for Him to come to us
 1. Butterflies at Meijer Gardens
 2. Harold Kushner—*When Bad Things Happen to Good People*

Kushner believes the pursuit of happiness is the wrong goal. ***"You don't become happy by pursuing happiness. You become happy by living a life that means something."***

Kushner sees *happiness as a by-product but never the primary goal*. He believes happiness is like a butterfly. Chase it and it will fly away from you and hide, but stop chasing the butterfly and get busy doing productive, useful

things and happiness “will sneak up on you from behind and perch on your shoulder”.

C. God’s Promise (v. 12-13)

(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 everything through him who gives me strength.

1. Paul was no “victim of circumstances”
 - a. Never let his circumstance ruin his day
 - b. He *chose* to be content no matter what befell him

2. He had seen it all...
 - a. For better —and—for worse
 - b. Richer—and—poorer
 - c. In sickness—and—in health

3. He wrote about it in his letter to the Corinthians
 - a. I Corinthians 4:11-13

(11) To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. (12) We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; (13) when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.

- b. II Corinthians 11:23-28

(23) Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. (24) Five times I received from the Jews the 40 lashes minus one. (25) Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, (26) I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from the Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. (27) I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and

have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. (28) Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

4. And yet, through it all he was able to proclaim:

(v. 11) “for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content”

5. The power of growing through adversity

a. Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved. (Helen Keller)

6. One final secret

Secret #6 *God has provided you with the strength to get through*

(13) I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

- a. “Life verse for many”
- b. Jesus and salvation
- c. Next time

III. Summary

A. The secret to contentment

- 1. God knows what’s best for you*
- 2. God cares deeply about you and your struggles*
- 3. God’s timing is always on schedule*
- 4. God’s favor doesn’t always mean abundance*
- 5. The tougher the struggle, the greater the growth*
- 6. God has provided you with the strength to get through*

B. Coping with circumstances

1. Dr. Theodore Parker Ferris in *“When Things Don’t Go Well.”*

- (1) “Remember that there is nothing that can happen to you that has not happened to millions of others.”
- (2) “Remind yourself that as a human being you run the risk of this kind of thing happening.” Life is fragile and love makes us vulnerable; we are going to be hurt, but our hurts will pass; some dreams will be shattered while others will come to fruition.
- (3) “Remember there are people who became great facing what you must now face.”
- (4) “Say, ‘I don’t know how I’m going to handle this, but I can. I know that from sources of which I am not conscious help will come, not necessarily the help I ask for, but help that I know nothing about right now will rise up in me, will appear suddenly from all sorts of unexpected places.’ ”

2. Contented if only God knows (#3753)

When the novelist, Dr. A.J. Cronin, was a practicing physician in a small Welsh mining community, he worked with a remarkable nurse. For more than twenty years Olive Davies had served the people with competence, patience, and cheerfulness. Her friend, the doctor, resented the inadequate salary with which her selfless work was rewarded.

“Late one night after a particularly strenuous case, I ventured to protest to her as we drank a cup of tea together. ‘Nurse,’ I said, ‘why don’t you make them pay you more? It’s ridiculous that you should work for so little.’ She raised her eyebrows slightly. But she smiled, ‘I have enough to get along.’ *‘No really,’* I protested and persisted, *‘you ought to have an extra pound a week at least. God knows you’re worth it.’*

There was a pause. Her smile remained but her gaze held a gravity, an intensity, that startled me. *‘Doctor!’* she said, *‘if God knows I’m worth it, that’s all that matters!’ ”*