

RUF Bible Study – Philippians: The Odyssey of the Heart  
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Philippians 4:10-20

*Philippians 4:10 I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. 11 Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

*14 Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. 15 And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. 16 Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. 18 I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. 19 And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. 20 To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

It seems like we all want to do something wild, something crazy. There is this pull to experience life TO THE MAX!, or at least that is what we're told by every car commercial, fragrance spray and soda out there. I guess I'm just not buying the right items or else things just continually fall short for me. When I was 30, I went sky diving. When I turned 40, I ran a marathon and had a party. What about when I turn 50? We're always looking for a thrill.

Chris McCandless was too. We don't exactly know what he was thinking, but we do know that he left Emory University, gave away all his savings and belongings and hitchhiked to Alaska, hoping to live off the land with minimal supplies. You can read about it or watch the movie entitled *Into the Wild*, which retraces his steps and interjects author John Krakauer's thoughts along the way.

Chris renamed himself Alexander Supertramp. He joined the mythical journey of those who are not content with life as they see it, and who venture into someplace new. He wasn't satisfied with the status quo of his life or of life at all, so he took a radical step.

In her book *The Poisonwood Bible*, Barbara Kingsolver writes of the Price family, who felt that Africa needed something – needed them – and took off, flying over to the Congo in the 1960s.

In his book *Zeitoun*, Dave Eggers writes of Abdulrahman Zeitoun, who stayed in New Orleans after Katrina in order to help save animals and distribute water. He'd canoe through the city saving people, until he himself was arrested and detained.

You can relate can't you? This is why you do anything really. Why you're in college. Why you want to lose weight. Why you want to change your major. Why you want to read a new book. Why you want to break up or get married. You just can't stand things to stay as they are.

Chris McCandless was found in an abandoned van after about 100 days of his wandering. We're not sure why or how he had died. It might have been from eating poisonous seeds. It was sad. It was tragic. It was unnecessary. Did he accomplish what he set out to do? He had a longing, a journey, something that he wanted to be different, but in the end, that very longing led him not to experience life all the more, but to death itself.

We all have a certain wanderlust. We all are on a journey, a vision quest of sorts. None of us are quite satisfied with the way things are. Let's see what Paul has to say about this for us today, see if this ancient letter might have something for our modern ears and hearts.

### **Contentment**

*I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

Paul writes that he has learned the secret of being content in any and every situation! Whoa. Wouldn't that be nice? Wouldn't that help to quell the insatiable longings of our heart? What is that secret?

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Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By Doug Serven, © Doug Serven, 2010, website: [www.ouruf.org](http://www.ouruf.org). For this series, I used commentaries by Boice, O'Brian, Thielman, Hanson Motyer and listened to sermons by as many people as I can find, especially Redeemer Presbyterian Church New York (various pastors) and Jeff Ferguson. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

It's not circumstantial. We know that for sure. Paul says that he has been brought low, and he's abounded. He's had plenty and he's had hunger. He's had abundance and he's had need.

We tend to think that contentment lies just around the corner, don't we. If I could just... and then we fill in the blank with whatever we think would make us truly happy. If I could just get to Christmas break! If I could just get to next semester. If I could just get a date this weekend. If I could just start dating. If I could just get engaged. If I could just get married. If I could just buy a house. If I could just get pregnant. If I could just deliver this baby. If I could just get a minivan. If I could just get these darn kids out of the house!

If I could just – it is the tyranny of our hearts. We are always longing for the next thing, and think that will be the thing that will save us and make us whole.

What is it for you? What are you longing for? What is the king of your heart? What is your satisfaction? What rules you? Is it the next A? Is it the next kiss? Is it the next promotion or internship? Is it the next beer? Where do you find your rejoicing?

I want to tell you tonight that contentment starts now. It can start now. It can start now if it's not rooted in the continual murky future, but if it is rooted in the eternal. If it's rooted in Christ. He is the secret to contentment. He is the bedrock of your life, and will always be solid footing for you.

That doesn't mean you stoically face trials and tribulations without emotion. You still hurt. You still cry. You still feel the pain of suffering and loss. But it doesn't ultimately kill you. It can't slay you. You have to keep remembering that Christ loved you before the foundation of the world, that you are his son or daughter, that he came to earth to live and die for you, that he raised again from the dead to show his power over death, and that he is coming again to reign in the world for forever. That is your hope. That is your foundation. That is your contentment. That you are eternally loved by God, a God who sacrificed everything for you!

Think about such things. Pray about such things. Talk to yourself about such things. There are heartbreaks in this world, but our contentment should not be rooted in these things or else we will blow around in the wind, emotionally unstable by if things go well or things go poorly.

Start contentment today. Look to Christ today. Find yourself, find your rest in him alone. Not in the next thing that will come along. Be content in who you are today in Christ, whatever station you find yourself in. Drive down deep into his stability and his power.

It's understandable to be restless, but may our restless hearts find our rest in him.

### **Community**

*10 I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity....14 Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble.*

Paul continues to hit this point hard. You are not alone in your journey with Jesus! It's not just you and Jesus. We have a community. Paul rejoices that they are concerned for him. He rejoices that they share in his troubles. There is a real and true partnership in the gospel together as we walk together with Christ in the church.

We need to be involved in community. We need it because we are a family and a team. We have to have each other's gifts and experiences along the way. When one of us is down and out, we need another to lift us up and hear us. When encounter the trials that will inevitably come along the way, we need to have someone to lean on, a shoulder to cry on, a place to go and talk and be heard, someone to pray for us.

Just this week, I received an email, like I do frequently, from someone telling me how he is angry, mad at God, things aren't going the way he wants them to go and he doesn't know what to do about them. He wasn't asking me to fix it or anything, not that I could anyway, but he wanted me to know how he was feeling. I called him and we talked for a few minutes and I prayed for him. Nothing profound necessarily, but on the other hand it really was. He told me he was hurting. I heard him and listened and didn't offer a trite answer but prayed with my friend in his grief.

You need friends like that. Both way. Whom you can call, and whom can call you. How do you get that? You are real and honest and vulnerable. You get to know people in small groups, and by going on trips and retreats and being in their homes. You invite people into your homes to pray with them and serve them and love them. You try as best as you can to attend their events when you know about them. You let people know when you're sick and need help or are in the hospital.

I think one of the things Chris McCandless did wrong was he went out in the woods alone to find himself. You can't find yourself by yourself. You can only find yourself by entering into community with others, by binding yourself to others and giving up the independence you so crave.

Connect with others. Connect with Christ and his church. He connects you with others. Share their burdens. Share your own. Let's carry them together as we walk with Jesus in community.

### **Commitment**

*15 And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. 16 Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. 18 I have received full payment, and*

*more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. 19 And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. 20 To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

In many ways this is a subset of community, because it's not a community of taking but one of giving. We show our love and our commitment by giving to others. In some ways, we give our very lives.

Think of the two I would say most intimate relationships – marriage and family. What do you think about an engaged person who only talks about the benefits of marriage? What he or she is going to get? I'm going to double my income. I'm going to get homecooked meals every night. I'm going to have sex any time I want it.

Or with kids – I'm going to increase my social standing. I'm going to have people guaranteed to love me. I'm going to feel fulfilled as a person.

No, no, no, no. I doubt many of us would be so crass as to so blatantly admit some of these things. They may be more subtly buried into our conversations and our thinking. But for many of us, ultimately our relationships are about our most important thing – *me*. We don't want to bless others; we want to be blessed. We don't want to serve; we want to be served. We don't want to give; we want to be given to.

Paul is telling the Philippian church that he loved being in community with them, and he knows that they are really in it because they have served him. They sent him money to support him and love him. That's the way it worked back then. If people didn't support you, you didn't even eat in prison. This is a church where Paul hasn't been for years and years, yet they still care for him deeply, enough to sacrifice for him.

But who benefited the most from these gifts. Not Paul he says, but in fact the Philippians themselves. Paul tells them, and he tells us, that it's actually the giver who gets the most from giving. As Jesus himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Wow. That is counter intuitive. That is not what the message of our world says. It's not the message of our consumer culture this Christmas season, as we approach Black Friday.

Paul's message is give! Not get but give. There is something we're missing about walking with Christ on this journey of faith if we're not giving sacrificially from our lives. I'm not talking about a health and wealth gospel here. I'm saying that there is a joy of sacrificing for others that we will not be able to know until we give.

Give your time. Give to others in their needs. I hear of you doing this and it makes my heart soar. When someone is down and out, has just been broken up with or has gotten bad news or is sick – many of you are there. Let's be a people who share in the heartaches of others as a real community. One of the way you give your time is by being at events and inviting others to come with you because you want them to be there and experience it too. So show up and invite others.

Give your resources. Let people borrow your car. Offer to drive. Help someone to study. Invite people into your apartment or your home. Loan someone a book.

Give yourself. You have gifts and talents, and you have *you*. We need you. We need you to be here. We need you to greet others and to offer those gifts and talents to others. We need you to smile and be friendly and go out and represent Christ to a hurting world. We need you to offer your hearts and your dreams to our world and our campus. We need you. All of you. Even your messiness. Don't hold back from us, but give yourself to us so we can be blessed to know you.

And give your money. There are needs in our midst. There are needs in our world. We have so, so much. Let's be content with what we have by giving away our money. So often we are promiscuous with our bodies and stingy with our money. Let's be more stingy with our bodies and more promiscuous and generous with our money. Let's move toward and then past giving 10% of our money. Let's bless others who are in needs. Let's sign up to give to causes here on our campus, across the globe and even in our very midst. Pay for someone to attend a conference. Help someone go on a mission trip. Sponsor a kid with Compassion. Pay for a student to attend a good school. Buy books for kids who don't have any. Buy a gift for an angel tree child whose parents are in jail and would otherwise get nothing.

God supplies all our needs according to his riches in Christ Jesus. This doesn't mean he will fill our bank accounts back up, but that he will fill our hearts back up.

When we truly give in our marriages, we get so much. When we truly give to our children, we get so much. We get back love. When we truly give to our Savior and our world, we get back so much. God supplies our every need. Let's be lavish in our generosity. Let's have radical acts of generosity be the norm and not the exception.

**Compassion.com** - When you sponsor a child, you are linked with one particular child who will know your name, write to you, and **treasure** the thought that you care. He or she will pray for you often and write to you.

**Thp.org** – The Hunger Project – empowering men and women to end their own hunger

**Mtw.org** – disaster response ministry and overseas missions

**Habitat.org** – help build homes in your neighborhood

**Teem.org** – the education and employment ministry in Oklahoma City

**Roomtoread.org** – the power of libraries and education

**Ruf.org/donate** – give to Doug and/or Natalie to keep them ministering on campus

Read a book about giving: *The Power of Half, Room to Read, 3 Cups of Tea*

James Montgomery Boice tells a story in his commentary about Lawrence of Arabia. Apparently, Lawrence of Arabia was living in Europe in a grand lifestyle and he invited all his sheik buddies to come visit him. They enjoyed a few months and loved their time together, but the thing they were most impressed with was the running water. They'd never seen running water before and you can imagine what these desert people would have thought about it. It was miraculous to them.

As they were departing, Lawrence of Arabia made a discovery. They had taken all of the faucets from his apartment, and gone out and bought more. They figured that the water came out of the faucets, and if they only had the faucets, they would have the water.

Needless to say, they were going to very disappointed. The didn't understand the source and the conduit of the water.

We must not only look at all the blessings we have, and we have so many!, but the source from whom all blessings flow. Do you know that source? Do you know they flow through and from Jesus?

Let me tell you about someone else who felt discontent. He hated working his desk job, working for the man. He knew he was made for more, and he longed for more, but he was stuck. His name was Bob Parr. Do you know Bob Parr? His wife Helen. Three kids.

Bob went searching for more and he found it. He started off like Chris McCandless. He started off just looking for an adventure to quench his own thirst, to satiate his own hunger, to fill his own lust. That's where Chris and Bob both went wrong.

But Bob's adventure changed at some point. It changed because he soon had a higher purpose. To save his family. Then to save the whole world. Bob was after all, Mr. Incredible, and that's a pretty super superhero to be. He had gifts and talents that had been shelved, but which were being unleashed to help others. He was giving again, not out of himself, but because he loved his community, his family. He had joy. He had life. He had trials and was beaten down, but he was not, he would not be defeated. He won the day. The world was saved, by giving, by community, by love.

You may not be a superhero. You are just you and I am just me. But we do have tremendous gifts and talents which are needed in this world.

How is it possible to escape the humdrum and live lives of excitement and joy? Look to Christ. Look to Jesus. He is the one who most cares for your soul. He is the one who gave up everything to die for you. He is the one who took all of the separation and being cast out so that you can be brought in. He makes real community because he came to die. The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. It's because he served you that you are able to serve others. It's because he gave his life that you are able to give yours. Not as an example. But out of his riches. Out of his strength. Out of his power. Out of his love. You who are poor, downcast, broken, weak and wounded, sick and sore. Jesus ready stands to save you, filled with wisdom joined with power. He is able. He is able! Doubt no more. Come to Jesus.