

Local Church

I Have Learned to Be Content

Philippians 4:11–13, NIV — “I am not saying this because I am in need, for 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.”

This is one of the best-known and most beloved texts in the New Testament. It teaches us profound lessons on how to conduct our financial lives according to the divine pattern. Note that Paul, the author of the text, does not say: “I like to live in scarcity.” What he does say is, “I have learned to live even in scarcity.”

Paul is not advising us to enjoy hardship and hunger. What he is telling us is that, throughout life, we may encounter difficult situations, and we will need to adapt to them without despairing. Adversity hits everyone’s life, and learning what Paul learned will make the difference between peace and despair.

The question is though: How do I learn what Paul learned? The key to understanding a life like Paul’s is in verses 11 and 13. In verse 11 he says, “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.” First, we will never learn how to face times of adversity if we don’t learn to be content with what we have. One way to do this is to avoid debts. The vast majority of debts are the result of being unhappy with the things we have. So as we pursue stuff we cannot afford, we incur debt. Second, being faithful in tithes and offerings is a statement that not everything belongs to me and that I can be content with only what is left in my hands.

And in verse 13 Paul says, “I can do all [things] through [Christ].” I’m sure you know people who can say, “With the money I have I can buy anything and I can do whatever I want.” But the biblical invitation is for us to say: Because I am in Christ “I can do all things.” The only way to learn contentment is to know that, in Christ, I already have everything that is really valuable and that, amid difficulty, the Divine Presence is my support.

Appeal: Let God lead you down the path of contentment by avoiding debt and being faithful to God.