

THANK GOD, PHIL 4:10-20

10 Step Program #10

◆ **Intro:** Picture in your mind your garage, your nice car, maybe your motorcycle, or your new riding mower. Or, if you're a lady, in your mind's eye, take a look through your closet at home, see all your shoes? Mentally open your jewelry drawers, or meander through your music room, or through your Cubs paraphernalia. Walk through your living room. Do you see your stereo? Your Alexa? That favorite chair? Cast your eyes across your back yard, the grill, your pool, maybe your camper...

◆ Now imagine it all floating down a river and you standing on your drive way with nothing left, not even a second pair of jeans. Or imagine for a second the scene after a tornado that touched down on your lot. All that's left on your block is a set of basements and cement slabs. Nothing above ground. Would your world stop? Would your heart stop... or be at peace standing on the driveway without your truck, without your gun collection, and well, without the house itself? I guess what we're asking is verse 12 of our text, "have you learned the secret of contentment in every situation, both when you have enough, and when you don't?"

◆ The Bible urges God-followers to become people who, even in the worst of circumstance could know contentment!

◆ *But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that." 1 Timothy 6:6-8, NIV.*

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◆ We're taking up the topic because the last step in God's 10 step program for healthy living is the commandment not to covet and ...

◆ **1. Contentment is the opposite of coveting.** The Westminster Shorter Catechism says:

◆ "The tenth commandment requires full contentment with our own condition with a right and charitable frame of spirit toward our neighbor and all that is his...and forbids all discontentment with our own estate, envying or grieving at the good of our neighbor.."

◆ So we're calling this last step the Thank God Step. The commandment not to covet is the commandment to live thankfully. When we covet, that is, when we want what another person has, we are not living in hope. And thankfulness is living in hope because of what we already have. So the command to not covet, is the command to be content through thankfulness. Lets look briefly and both sides, what not to do, and what to do. On the negative side of the command we are told...

◆ **2. The beautiful life avoids comparison.** This is the prohibition. Stop comparing yourself to everyone else. This is very hard especially in a culture that teaches us to compare. Covetousness is not considered a sin in our culture. Rather it is our way of life and followers of Jesus are not immune! We live in an attitude of entitlement. Everyone should have the same chances, the same rights, the same things, the same

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opportunities as everyone else, we are told, as though that is what freedom means. No one should have any more of a chance than someone else. Doesn't matter where you're from, how you got here, what you did. No demerits for lawbreaking, no reward for law-keeping. No expectations for citizenship. No expectations to earn your own way. We think we deserve or have a right to everything everyone else has. We are not happy for others. And if they are happy, we assume we ought to have everything they do. They only serve to make us want more. This is of course the heart of socialism; no one is to have any more than me, and I am to have no less than you. As some examples in our news a lot these days, consider these...

- ◆ Did I break the law to get in the country? So what. Shouldn't I have the same rights as people who live here?
- ◆ Am I not married? So what. Shouldn't I have the same privileges as married people?
- ◆ I recall a commercial for a smart phone that explained how we now have the technology to take pictures of all the moments in our day and publish them before the world instantly from where we stand! Praise the Heavens! And the tag line was you should get this phone because you have a *right* to this self-expression. Do you? Really? It's as though we no longer believe in the right to life, liberty and the *pursuit* of happiness. We want someone else to *give* us happiness!

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◆A. Equality of personhood does not mean we all have the same rights. You do not have a right to my home. I do not have a right to your home. I do not have the right to be born in your family or in your country. I do not have the right to your salary, at least not without doing the same work you did. [The Bible says "If a man will not work, he will not eat."] This is a misconstrual of freedom and part of what God is commanding against. Coveting is when I want what I have no right to. That's why the neighbor's wife is mentioned in the command. There is nothing wrong with desiring a woman per se, if she is unmarried, for example. God is not saying all desire is coveting. He is saying there is appropriate and inappropriate desire. To desire a wife, for instance, is a good thing according to Prov18:22. Just not your neighbor's, according to Exodus 20. She needs to be a free agent. So don't make it a practice to dream about her. (That's what porn is, isn't it? Coveting someone's body that you have no right to.) Coveting distorts life.

◆B. But coveting can get even uglier. Coveting is also when I want to have *instead of you*. That is, I don't just want one like you, I want yours. I don't just want to have it, I want you not to have it. I want to be the haver, the one with, the top of that particular heap, whatever heap it may be. I want to beat you in the having race. So God says, "Look here, You need to stop comparing yourself with others. Comparison messes up your

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contentment. And comparison is as the heart of coveting.”

Examples:

◆ Baby A have two blocks. Baby B has one. So of course that’s the one Baby A wants, right? Baby A and B become young man A & B. Without any spiritual formation, only thing different is that it’s cars now instead of blocks. But the dynamic is the same. If A gets what B has and B gets something different, A will just want that too.

◆ Another way we see this comparison stain in ourselves is in how we often value something merely because someone else doesn’t have it! Look at fashion; it’s the hot new style precisely because it’s new and nobody has it. We see the runway models from New York city strutting in front of the cameras wearing god-awful get ups no one would ever wear in our city. But someone somewhere with money to burn will buy it because nobody else has it.

◆ Final example: Few people have a steel 1943 penny. They are therefore worth 15 copper pennies, even though steel is cheap metal, cheaper than copper. If you find a *copper* 1943 penny, it's a rare mistake. Copper was needed for WW2 so in 1943 pennies were made of steel. A few copper ones were minted by *mistake*. One can be worth \$10,000 just because no one else has one. Crazy huh? That’s the human.

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◆ But realize that this Comparison deflates contentedness. Even wealth can be seen as poverty by the constantly comparing mind. We sometimes judge ourselves poor not because we don't have, but on the basis of what we think we should have. I've overheard people who easily spend more on sports tickets and vacations in a month than I make in a month –lament out loud that they haven't climbed very high on the economic ladder! Your belly may be bursting with bread, but if you hear of someone eating cake, some folks will not feel full. There's an old Greek myth that says Zeus came and granted a man any wish he wanted provided that his neighbor would get twice as much. Unable to bear the thought of his neighbor's fortune exceeding his own, he wished to lose one eye.

◆ On the other hand, some kids grow up never having ridden in a plane, gone to another country to hunt or fish, having few changes of clothes. But they never felt the poorer for it, because they didn't think about those things at all.

◆ *"Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Luke 12:15, NIV.*

◆ This coveting comparison we've been talking about is what God says needs to die if you want a healthy life. What needs to come to life?

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◆**3. The beautiful life practices thankfulness.** Covetousness is a form of greed that can see only what it doesn't have.

Thankfulness is the art and practice of seeing what one does have! Thankfulness produces contentment. In our passage, Paul is not excited because the Philippians sent him a present. Paul is excited because it's just so cool to see those Philippians being generous! He's like a dad shaking his head from side to side in pure enjoyment that his kid did a right thing without being told!

◆“I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me...I am not saying this because I am in need” Philippians 4:10, 11, NIV. He “rejoices” at their gift, but not because he “need”s it.

◆“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.” Philippians 4:12, NIV. Circumstance has nothing to do with contentment!

◆“I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” Philippians 4:13, NIV. (This verse is often used wrongly to tell kids they can be whatever they want to be when they grow up, and accomplish any task they might feel like. That’s simply not true.) This verse is specifically referring to the whole spectrum of being in need to being in plenty: “I can do it/ make it, no matter where I land on the line of wealth. It’s ok, Christ will take care of me.”

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- ◆ Check out v19 in our text. “And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:19, NIV.
Paul can encourage contentment because he knows God is a supplier of needs, not an inflater of living standards, or the watchman of our money. But the supplier of needs.
- ◆ Know why we're not thankful more? Know why we covet so much? Because we think contentment depends on circumstance, but it doesn't. Contentment comes from noticing what we already have and being grateful for it. (do this as a Readers Theater with two volunteers...)
- ◆ A wealthy industrialist was disturbed when he stumbled upon a fisherman sitting lazily on the beach beside his boat. “Why aren't you out the fishing?” he asked.
- ◆ “Because I've caught enough fish for today,” came the reply.
- ◆ “Why don't you catch more fish than you need?” the rich man wanted to know.
- ◆ “What would I do with them?” asked the fisherman.
- ◆ “You could earn more money,” came the impatient reply, “and buy a better boat so you could go deeper and catch more fish, and make more money. Soon you'd have a fleet of boats and be rich, like me!”
- ◆ “The fisherman asked, “Then what would I do?”
- ◆ “You could sit down and enjoy life,” said the industrialist.
- ◆ “What do you think I'm doing now?” the fisherman replied.

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◆ *"Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless. As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them? The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep." Ecclesiastes 5:10-12, NIV.*

◆ C. Here are some practical ideas for becoming content:

◆ Don't read the sale flyers for a few months. After all, if we need something, we go look for it. Sale flyers are not normally about what we're looking for. They are about what we don't have, but might want.

◆ Start a list of blessings. See if you can name 100 things that you are thankful for. Ann Voskamp made a list of 1000 and it changed her life so much she wrote a book about it. As a variation, take 100 pictures on your smart phone making an album of things you're grateful for.

◆ Buy an off-brand of something even if you can afford the name-brand. Do it as a spiritual exercise in being content without having to have the best, or most expensive coffee, or the softest toilet paper.

◆ **Conclusion:** People sometimes argue that it's no problem really if you want the wrong things or want to do the wrong things as long as you don't act on it, as though all God cares about is what we actually end up doing during life. You can't read the 10th Commandment and still think that. Just as Jesus intensified the commandments in Matthew 5, so the last commandment clearly moves us far deeper into the

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desperate fallenness in our spirits. The command to not covet, and to be thankful, is obeyed on the inside, in the wants, and the heart. Paul said he learned the secret of being content. What was it? It isn't a what, but a who. It is "him who gives me strength" (v13). It is "my God" whose riches come in "Christ Jesus." You see, Paul knew our Master, Jesus! The man who came from heaven. Who healed with a touch or a thought. Who paid the death-price of human sin, your sin, my sin. The man who couldn't stay dead. Who walked again. If you have this man in your life you can't lose! The riches of heaven are forever in your future. The wisdom of heaven is available to your heart in his commandments! Why would you not accept his forgiveness of sin? Why would we not seek, even clamor for his insights? This is not Dr. Oz on losing belly fat. This is God on losing death and gaining real life.