

*The grass is always
greener on the other side*



Contentment in Christ

Philippians 4:6-13

⁶ *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

⁸ *Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things. ⁹ The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you*

¹⁰ *But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: ¹² I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. ¹³ I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*

WANT OR NEED?

This is not a debate about the difference between want and need. The terms “I am in want” or “I am in need” mean the same thing...I am lacking something essential to life. However to say “I want” or “I need” something is more descriptive of our *perception* of what is essential...and this has been mammothly warped in our society.

The use of these two words heavily relies on context, and there are different extents in the use of both. But, to make this a little easier, below is how we would define ‘want’ and ‘need’.

Want - Feel or have a *desire* for

Need - Anything that is *essential* but lacking

Essential

- ✳ vitally necessary
- ✳ basic and fundamental
- ✳ of the greatest importance
- ✳ anything indispensable

Like I said, we are not going to debate over whether you want, or need, that new pair of shoes...you may actually need them, it's contextual. So, I guess our focus should be on our *attitude* toward what we do and do not have rather than what we do or do not need.

CONTENT OR DISCONTENT?

The focus of this study is on our “inward disposition” – our attitude. To be quite frank, this study is not concerned with what you do or do not have or what you do or do not need. This study is designed to remind you of what you do and do not *deserve*, thus changing your attitude to life. We are all on the same playing field here. Don't be fooled, being content with what you have is just as challenging as finding contentment in your lack.

Contentment is a state of mind in which one's desires are confined to his lot whatever it may be.

Discontentment is a dissatisfaction and longing for something better than the present situation or circumstances.

Now, since we are told to be spiritually minded (of Christ) and not carnally minded (of the flesh), we need to look at contentment in light of our standing on this principle.

Romans 8:6-9

For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.

I'd like to look at Romans 8:5. This is a pretty hard hitting verse when you really start to study it.

Romans 8:5

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

Live according to...

The more accurate and descriptive word here would be *conformity*. Conformity is the process by which an individual's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors are influenced by another source. Let me list some more specific phrases so that we can see where we are in this verse...

- ✳ being of the same opinion
- ✳ be similar, be in line with
- ✳ acting according to certain accepted standards
- ✳ a state of cooperation – acting together in harmony
- ✳ act in accordance of expectations - meeting the set demands

It would be easy for us to dismiss this phrase as being simply something we do...living is something we do right? But it's not merely pointing to our acts that are 'worldly', but to our attitudes, beliefs *and* behaviours that conform to the opinion of the world. It is easy enough to get caught up doing the wrong thing, but it's a whole different ball game when it comes to *who* and *what* you believe.

Conformity is the act of granting rights!

Set their minds on...

Again, this is something we do...consciously. It involves our will *and* affections. As you can see this phrase doesn't just mean 'to think about' it also means to 'be devoted to' and to 'think the same as'. No, we can't avoid the unconscious worldly thoughts from entering our mind, but we can choose whether we are going to think about them or reject them.

Setting your mind on something is a deliberate action!

OF THE FLESH OR SPIRIT

I'm sure by now you have probably thought about where you sit in this verse, but let's do a quick summary of what the bible says are things of the flesh and things of the spirit.

WORKS OF THE FLESH Galatians 5:19-21		FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT Galatians 5:22-23
➤ outbursts of wrath	➤ adultery	➤ love
➤ selfish ambitions	➤ fornication	➤ joy
➤ dissensions	➤ uncleanness	➤ peace
➤ heresies	➤ lewdness	➤ longsuffering
➤ envy	➤ idolatry	➤ kindness
➤ murder	➤ sorcery	➤ goodness
➤ drunkenness	➤ hatred	➤ faithfulness
➤ revelries	➤ contentions	➤ gentleness
	➤ jealousies	➤ self-control

From this summary we should be able to determine a couple of things:

1. Where do my actions fit in
2. Where do my deliberate thoughts fit in

Now, I don't want anyone to try and tell me that they don't fit at lease somewhere into the 'works of the flesh'. The reason I can say this is because John tells us...

1 John 1:8,10

⁸*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*
¹⁰*If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.*

So let's not get off on the wrong foot...besides we are doing this study because we want to find contentment in Christ, right? Good.

Ok so at this point we have decided a couple of things:

1. Whether our will, affections and behaviours are conforming to the spirit or world
2. Whether we want to 'be of the same opinion' as the spirit or the world

From here, assuming we're 'of the spirit'; we need to identify our discontentment's and learn to be content.

OUR SORE SPOTS

Let's briefly look at 3 areas of our lives where we become the most discontent:

- a. Possessions
- b. Potential
- c. Position

POSSESSIONS (WEALTH)

I don't mean to be a party pooper or anything but reality in the 'spiritual realm', has absolutely nothing to do with possessions. In fact, it has so little to do with them that Jesus Himself tells a young man to give up *all* that he has, and follow Him.



Matthew 19:21

Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

Now, I'm not saying that possessions are 'sinful'; if they were we (Christians) would all be living on the street! Then what good would we be to anyone? If the church at Philippi didn't have any money or possessions then how could they have blessed Paul while he was in prison? Exactly. The problem is one of treasure.

Matthew 6:21

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also

The word 'treasure' is derived from the meaning, 'to set in a proper place' or 'assign a place'. The word heart means 'centre of human life'; that is, the seat of desires, feelings, affections, passions and impulses.

Let's do an exercise before we go any further. I want you to get this...

Let's say my treasure is money.

If I give the value of money a 'proper place' or a place of 'significant value' in my life, then that will become the centre of my life which will drive and determine all of my desires, feelings, affections, passions and impulses! That's a little scary!

I'm skeptical, let's see if that would be true:

If money (or possession) is the driving force in my life:

1. I would want be wealthy, which leads to:
 - a. Becoming a workaholic
 - b. Striving for professional position
 - c. Working the stock or property markets
 - d. Gambling
 - e. Lacking generosity
2. The lack of money would make me feel
 - a. Needy
 - b. Like I've lost value
 - c. Depressed and anxious
 - d. Angry at myself and others
 - e. Lonely because I can no longer socialize like I normally would
3. The abundance of wealth causes me to
 - a. Desire expensive things
 - b. Dismiss the value of inexpensive things
 - c. Dismiss the value of those less wealthy
 - d. Desire the companionship of those in the same 'class'
 - e. Become passionate and consumed by wealth gaining activities
4. The abundance of wealth drives me toward
 - a. Impulse spending
 - b. Accumulating debt
 - c. Always wanting more
 - d. A place where I will never be satisfied.

Wow, it's actually true!

'Treasure' also means to 'gather up or collect'. If we are building up our wealth (or possessions) because we desire them to fill or fulfill our lives then we are building up treasures here on earth which we are warned against...

Matthew 6:19-20

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal."

Hang on, lets go back to Matthew 19:21, I forgot something.

Jesus says to the young man "If you want to be *perfect...*" What the? How on earth is selling my possessions and giving to the poor going to make me perfect? Well, I looked up the word 'perfect' and it means 'one that has all the necessary qualities' and 'unspotted from the world'. Now, I have an issue here because 'wealth' can't possibly be something that we shouldn't desire. Why? Because God is wealthy...He is *the most wealthy!*

Revelation 21:21

The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

Now, you can't tell me that you know someone with all that in their house! But God's gold and pearls are not His 'riches'. We are told what His 'riches' are (just to name a few)...

Romans 2:4

Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering...

Romans 9:23

and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy...

Romans 11:33

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

Ephesians 1:7

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace

You see, although God is rich, His 'riches' are wrapped up in His character...and so should ours. If our material 'riches' are what we treasure, then we are becoming 'spotted by the world' for the world seeks material gain.

POTENTIAL

Think back to when you were a child...what did you want to be when you grew up? Are you that now? What are you doing now? Is it what you expected to doing? Are you who you thought you'd be? Does it really matter?



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It can be hard to be content with who we are, or what we are able to do, in a world that is so driven by success and profile. Not only do other people have expectations of us but we have unreasonable expectation of ourselves. There is nothing wrong with achieving things in life, but when striving for achievement is what gives us worth, then we need to come back down to earth.

Once again we need to find our perspective and our treasure. Are *we*, our treasure? If we are then we will need to expect disappointed in ourselves at some stage. In John 15:5 Jesus tells us...

John 15:5

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

Notice how he likens us to branches from a vine. He doesn't say, without Me you won't be all that you can be, nor does He say that with Me you won't do great things. He says without Me *you can do nothing*. Just like the branches of the vine cannot live if they are not attached to the vine, neither can we do anything *at all* without Him.

Genesis 2:7

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

Yes, even those who deny God where made in His image, and they all possess the living breath of God. But whether they 'abide' in Him is a completely different thing. Even so, without God's living breath within us as humans we wouldn't even exist. But Jesus is faithful and gracious, not only enabling us to achieve in the 'human' realm but He even says that we will do greater works than He did.

John 14:12

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father

Even Jesus claims that He can do nothing of Himself...

John 5:19

Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner

But the most important thing to remember is that we are not our own. As Disciples of Christ we have Him living inside us. He will work in us for His pleasure, not ours.

Philippians 2:13

for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

POSITION

Have you ever seen the show “Keeping up Appearances”? There is a lady, Mrs Bouquet, who lives a fairly simple life yet insists on maintaining her upper-class appearance. Not only is she concerned with what she and her husband wear, she also judges her neighbours dress sense too, indicating that she ‘*cant* be seen with someone dressed like that’! Her life is completely consumed with her perceived ‘position’ in society. Is she happy? Is her husband happy? Absolutely not! Nothing ever goes smoothly for her, and she is always stressed about what other people think about her. Those that have seen the show know exactly what I’m talking about.



I know someone a bit like that. They earn a small wage, yet insist on renting a huge and expensive house so that they ‘look to be’ in a better class of people than others that they know. Why do they do that? Why is it so bad to just be on the same scale as most other people? Do they think that they are better than us?

Romans 12:3

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly

In this verse, to ‘think soberly’ means to be ‘sane’ or ‘in one’s right mind’. I had a chuckle to myself because, really, what this verse is saying is that you must be kidding if you think you’re better than you are! That’s enough to bring you down a notch hey?! We need to remember that as Christians, we are living in God’s economy, not ours. Everything is upside down in the spirit.

Matthew 20:16

So the last will be first, and the first last.

We really need to decide which realm we are going to exist in. Once we’ve decided that then we can make some re-calculations about where our values lie.

It is not the lack of possessions, potential, or position that makes us discontent, it is questioning the possessions, potential, and positions God has given to us graciously and selfishly desiring more! More! More!

LEARNING CONTENTMENT

CONTENTMENT IS SOMETHING THAT IS LEARNED

Philippians 4:11

Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content.



Read onto verse 12 and count how many time Paul indicates that he had learnt, been taught, or knows. Four times in just 2 verses! I assume this must be important. So who taught Paul to be content? Where did he learn? How did he learn it? What did he learn?

Who taught Paul to be content?

Paul was a bondservant of Christ (Romans 1:1). Paul was a disciple; a learner! He was also a discipler; a teacher. His life entailed learning from the Lord and teaching others to do the same. So whatever he learned with regard to contentment, he learner from the Holy Spirit.

Where did Paul learn?

Paul learnt his contentment in his suffering. Just read 2 Corinthians 1, 4, 6, 11 and 12. You will see Paul experiencing all kinds of hardships.

How did he learn?

Paul learnt his contentment through his *need* to trust in Christ.

2 Corinthians 1:8-9

that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead

Paul also learned to be content in Christ having understood the wisdom of God through Him (1 Cor 1:18-25).

What did he learn?

Self-sufficiency in God

Paul learned to be self-sufficient or content. Not the self-sufficiency of the Stoics, but that of self-sufficiency in what God had ordained for his life. He learned to be content with his standing in Christ, independent of all the changing circumstances of life, but dependant on God and God alone (2 Corinthians 6:1-10).

The comfort and peace of God

He learned that the Lord comforts, but he also learned that the comfort given to him by God was to be used to encourage and comfort those who also need comfort.

2 Corinthians 1:4

who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

The sufficiency of God's grace

Paul was abounding in wisdom through revelation from God, yet for him to remain humble he suffered many things. Paul was weak in the flesh just like the rest of us and he cried out to God to remove the suffering from him. Yet God afforded him the opportunity to learn of God's sufficient grace.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Simplicity and sincerity of Conduct

Paul learned how to conduct himself in simplicity and sincerity before God. Not that his ability came from his own wisdom to do so but through the grace of God.

2 Corinthians 1:12

For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you.

Selflessness

He learned he could pray and think about others instead of murmuring (Rom 1:8-9, 1 Cor 1:4-9, 2 Cor 1:3-4)

To praise God in his trials

Paul and Silas sang instead of sulking.

Acts 16:23-25

And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

To look beyond the temporal

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

CONTENTMENT DOES NOT DEPEND ON CIRCUMSTANCE

Philippians 4:12

I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

As we can see from Paul's life, contentment is not about what we do or don't have; or our wants or needs. Neither is it about what state of health we are in, nor of our loneliness or great social status. Our contentment is about our opinion or attitude toward our situation. In fact it has more to do with our attitude towards God!

Do we trust that God has control over our life? Do we believe that the wisdom of God is being taught to us? Maybe He is just loving us?

THE CHASTENING OF GOD

Proverbs 3:11-12

My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor detest His correction; for whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights.

What does it mean to be chastened by God? Well it can mean a couple of things:

1. Instruction
2. Discipline
3. Correction

I sometimes wonder why my life has been so rough. It could be extremely easy for me to become bitter toward God because He didn't save me from it all. But I don't believe in accidents, so maybe God has been teaching me something. Did I need to be taught? Yep. Did I need discipline? Absolutely. We all know that children (mostly teenagers) eventually learn from their own mistakes, right? Parents will do their best to instruct them from their own experiences so that they don't have to experience the same struggles. However, parents can only do so much, and eventually they need to take a 'hands off' approach to allow their child to learn... 'the hard way'. Sound familiar? So why should it be any different in God's economy? We are children of God and He loves us. He has tried to teach us all that we could through His Word, yet when we refuse to follow His advice, the best He can do is allow us to experience it for ourselves. But that's not in vain of course. I have learned so much through my struggles, and I know I will be able to use what I've learned to help others in theirs. Sure, they will still need to go through the experience themselves, but if they didn't then who would teach the people coming behind them?

Learning to be content is a process not an outcome.

A RIGHTEOUS DISCONTENTMENT

Yes, I know, after spending all that time convincing you to be content in Christ, now I'm going to tell you that you'll never be content! Well, kind of. I think Psalms 17:15 says it all...

Psalms 17:15

As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.

That is true discontent contentment! The author to the Hebrews highlights the hope that we have in Christ.

Hebrews 7:19

on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

We are content with our earthly experiences because we know what lies ahead for those who endure.

1 Peter 1:4

to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

A MATTER OF VALUE

WHAT DO YOU MOST VALUE?

Really the question here should be "What do you place your trust in?" Do you trust your possessions to bring you contentment? Have you ever wished that you had more money so that you could pay off the house or go on that holiday? If so, then you are not content. The same goes for any other part of your life where you wish things could be better.

What I have learned is that I would rather be struggling with an area of life and gaining deeper understanding and peace in my hope in Christ than I would to be 'living it up' in the shallowness of the world. Moses gave us a good example of where to fix our gaze.

Hebrews 11:24-27

By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.

Is your value and trust on the things that are but a vapor? Or, is your trust and rest found in the God of peace? If only this was the cry of our heart every moment of every day.

Psalms 73:25

Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.

THE SECRET OF CONTENTMENT

THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST

Paul dictates so beautifully his passion for Christ. The immeasurable value of the righteousness of Christ makes everything else worthless. All the confidence that Paul had in his Jewish standing he counted as loss. He must have sounded absolutely crazy! Your Jewish position meant everything, that is what they strived to attain! But here, Paul realises just how temporal and superficial the achievements of the flesh really are.

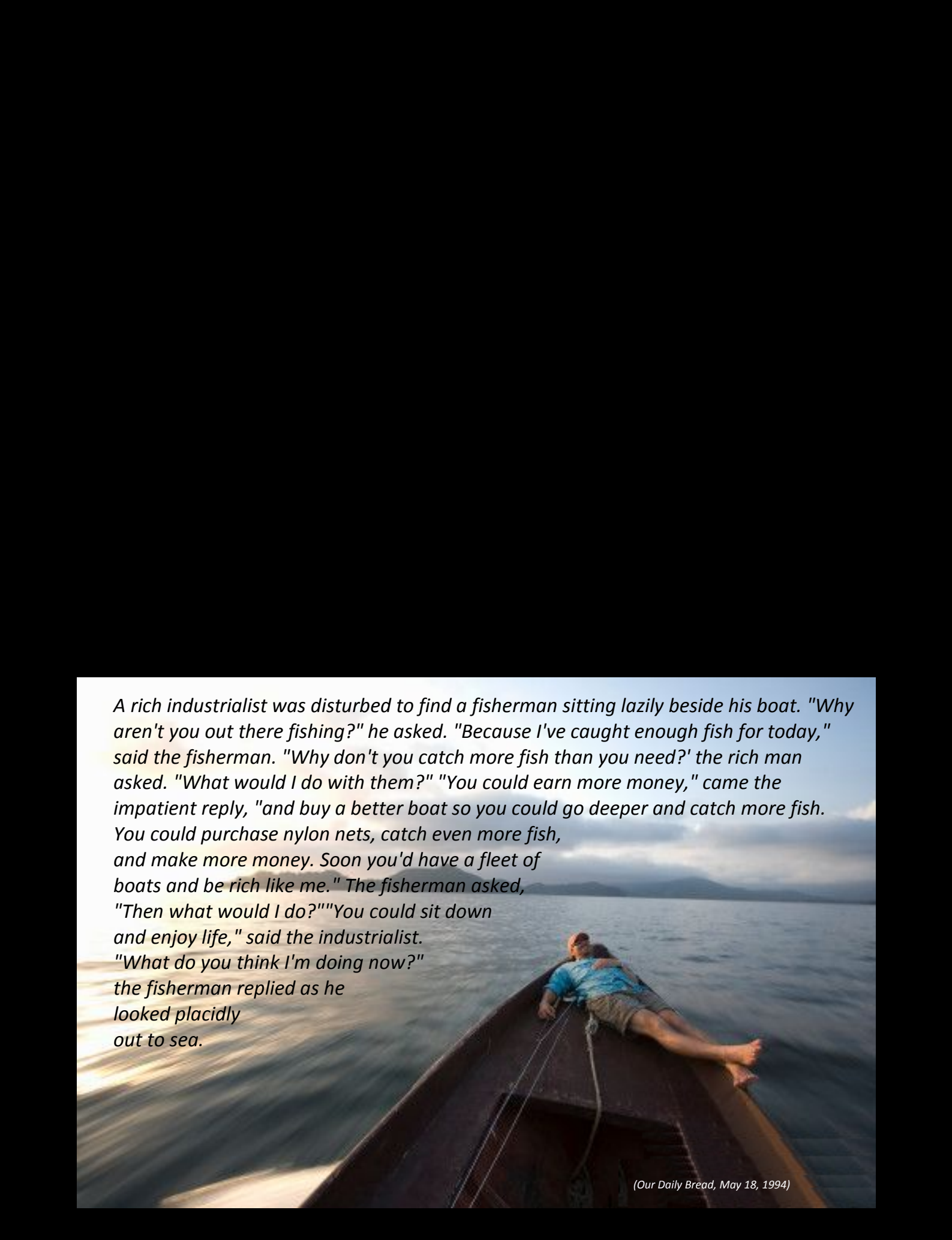
Philippians 3:3-11

For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh; though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Unless we grasp the excellence of the knowledge of Christ, we won't ever find true contentment. You will never be willing to give up *all that you have* to follow Him.

1 John 2:15-17

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

A man in a blue shirt and shorts is lying down in a small boat on a body of water, looking out at the sea. The background shows a calm sea and distant mountains under a clear sky.

A rich industrialist was disturbed to find a fisherman sitting lazily beside his boat. "Why aren't you out there fishing?" he asked. "Because I've caught enough fish for today," said the fisherman. "Why don't you catch more fish than you need?" the rich man asked. "What would I do with them?" "You could earn more money," came the impatient reply, "and buy a better boat so you could go deeper and catch more fish. You could purchase nylon nets, catch even 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 as he looked placidly out to sea.

(Our Daily Bread, May 18, 1994)