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# FOLKS Like Us

PAUL

“The Power of Contentment.”

Timeless truths from our ancient past,  
for a journey with God in the modern era.

**Fran Sciacca**

## “Folks Like Us” — an introduction

Over the years I’ve written and published a number of Bible studies that collectively have sold well over a half-million copies. They were forged, most of them, in the furnaces of pain, doubt, and loneliness. Maybe that’s why they were well-used, they touched people where they hurt most.

Recently, my publisher decided that they no longer wanted to handle the books that contained these 60 or so individual studies. So, I’ve decided to make them available to any who might benefit from them. At no cost.

I have always believed that because God thought it best to become human in the Incarnation, that perhaps “incarnational truth” was His preferred method of revealing Himself and His purposes to us. I suppose that’s where the basic genre of these studies originated. I wanted to provide believers with Bible studies rooted in our ancestral past. The lives of men and women, who it turns out, are “folks just like us” in so many ways.

So, please take your time and work slowly through as many of these studies as you care to do... there’s a lot of them! And may God use the combination of the struggles and insights of your *ancient* brothers and sisters, combined with those of mine, your modern brother, to help you in your spiritual journey. That is the goal of this project.

Warmly in The Lamb,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Fran Sciacca". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Fran Sciacca  
Birmingham, AL

# PAUL

## *“The Power of Contentment.”*

**A** **BIDING PRINCIPLE** – The genuineness of our contentment is perhaps the most accurate measure of our understanding and acceptance of God's lovingkindness, His competence, and His sovereignty.

*“True contentment is a thing as active as agriculture. It is the power of getting out of any situation all that there is in it. It is arduous, and it is rare.”* — G.K. Chesterton

**T**he apostle Paul, more than any other biblical figure, was a man of cosmopolitan experience. In his ministry, he mingled with more ethnic groups, visited more cities, saw a wider range of human emotions, and encountered a greater diversity of thoughts and perspectives than any other person in the pages of God's Word. Paul's life was a punctuated series of vacillating extremes. In one city he was deified and worshiped as an incarnation of a god. In another town he had to be lowered from the city wall in a basket at night to escape imminent death. Exonerated and beaten, esteemed and despised, Paul was well-acquainted with the fickle nature of life. Yet through it all, Paul exhibited a character quality that, perhaps more than any other characteristic, is a barometer of what one really believes about God's love and His sovereignty in our lives. Contentment. Its growing presence in our lives indicates progress in sanctification, but its absence is evidence of either a misunderstanding of the gospel or a refusal to surrender the quiet but very real desire to be the one in control of life...especially our own.

**KEY SCRIPTURE:** Philippians 4:4-20

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### **STUDY QUESTIONS...**

1. Paul speaks of contentment in all circumstances in Philippians 4:10-11 Summarize what some of these circumstances were for Paul based on what you find in the following passages.

Acts 16:22-25

Acts 19:8-12

2 Corinthians 1:8-10

2 Corinthians 7:5-7

2 Corinthians 11:27-28

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Philippians 4:14-18

2. Read Philippians 1:13-14. Why is it particularly powerful for Paul to extol contentment based on what was going on in his life?
  
3. Paul's choice of words in Philippians 4:11 is very significant. The word translated "content" is used only here in the New Testament. It is a compound word that basically means to need no outside help or assistance. This idea could be misunderstood or misconstrued to suggest that we are meant to be self-sufficient or independent. Compare Philippians 4:11 with 2 Corinthians 12:9 and Philippians 4:13. What broader understanding about contentment do you get from Paul looking at all three of these verses?

“Contentment” for Paul meant . . .

4. Carefully read Hebrews 13:5 several times. This verse portrays contentment as arising from our choice to focus on one thing in the midst of everything that we have. What is it?

How do you think that this can produce contentment in *all* circumstances?

5. A sobering principle about contentment is contained in two Old Testament passages that deal with the failure of the Israelites in this area. Summarize the central truth regarding contentment and lack of contentment contained in these verses.

Exodus 16:8

Numbers 14:26-27

6. What does Colossians 3:5 teach about the *absence* of contentment and its impact on one's relationship with God? Look carefully!
  
7. Paul makes a very powerful connection between contentment (or the lack of it) and our sanctification in Philippians 2:12-15. Why is it significant that his comments in verse 14 follow right on the heels of what he says about God in the previous verse?

### **LOOKING BACK...**

**P**aul, writing from prison, said he had come to the place in his life where he had been initiated into something that not everyone knew or even believed. He claimed that he understood that true contentment was the result of trusting fully in God's sufficiency. He also had confidence that the greater his need, the greater God's provision. Consequently, he was able to be "content" in all circumstances because he could do all things through Christ's strength. Contentment is the conviction that what we have is enough because we have God Himself. If His grace is sufficient and His presence is permanent, we do possess everything in every circumstance. When we are dissatisfied and desire more, we are by definition assuming that He has become less. Finally, the true contentment that we seek is inseparably bound to our progress in godliness—sanctification.

### **APPLICATION QUESTIONS**

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8. Below is a sampling of various areas in life where all of us struggle with contentment. Describe how these verses might apply to your own life.

Proverbs 19:3

Matthew 6:31-32

Luke 3:14

Luke 8:14

Luke 12:15

Romans 12:3-8

Galatians 1:10

1 Timothy 6:6-8

James 1:2-4

9. Discontentment is never quiet or still. In fact, its clearest expression is addressed repeatedly in the Bible. In the Old Testament, the word is translated "murmuring" or "grumbling." The majority of times the word is used, it refers to "camping" or "lodging" somewhere (see Numbers 17:5 and Numbers 22:8). In your own words, explain how we are "lodging" or "camping" on an issue when we grumble or complain.
  
10. In the New Testament, one of the words translated "grumbling" or "murmuring" actually refers to the sound made by doves cooing or bees buzzing. It is typically employed when groups of people are conferring or talking among themselves, like the Pharisees in Luke 5:30 or Jesus' audience in John 6:41-43. Why do you think discontent and grumbling thrives in group situations?
  
11. Look carefully at the following passages of Scripture. They describe the thoughts of people who *are* content. Pinpoint *why* you think the person in each verse is content. Begin each of your answers with the phrase, "Contentment lives in the person who . . ."

Psalm 4:7

Psalm 34:1

Psalm 63:3

Psalm 73:21-26

Psalm 119:69-70

Proverbs 15:16

Isaiah 26:3

Colossians 3:15-17

What have you discovered from these verses regarding your own struggles with contentment? What needs to change? What can you do for a first step?

12. Write out 1 Timothy 6:6 below.

Underline the two things that Paul says should go together.

Do you think it is possible to have one without the other? Explain your answer.

13. Look over your responses to question 8 above. Think about some of your conversations with people (including family) over the past week. How many areas of life from Question 8 have *you* "camped on" in regard to discontent? Put a star by the ones that you have "murmured" about to someone else.



14. Look at your responses to question 11 Think back again on your conversations over the past week. How would you rate your speech in regard to pointing others to God's goodness to you? Explain.

15. Prayerfully assess your answers to the last two questions. Select one area where you need to see God develop a heart and tongue of contentment in your life. Enlist a friend or family member who hears you speak frequently to pray for you as you seek to change the way you think and then speak. Ask him or her to faithfully alert you when you begin to "murmur."

Area where I seek God's help to develop contentment

Person (or persons) I will ask to help me

### **SCRIPTURE MEMORY**

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The true "target" of murmuring – Exodus 16:8

Contentment and my transformation – 1 Timothy 6:6