

“Greedy or Needy?”—Philippians 4:11-13

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Greedy or Needy?”, is Philippians 4:11-13 → *Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 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. I can do all things through Him Who strengthens me.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

Francis is a man who has a difficult time keeping a job. His life consists of seeking out one homeless shelter after another to lay his head each night. His time is spent trying to find the next meal where asking for a handout is a way of life. Going from person to person, church to church and human care agency to human care agency, rejection means nothing to him. He’ll eventually find someone that day who will either feel sorry for him or give him something to get the ordeal over with as soon as possible or will feel guilty saying “no,” thus feeling

obligated to help him. How would you describe a needy person?

David and Becky stand together in their front yard staring at what was once their home, now flattened by a tornado with the remnants of their possessions strewn amongst the debris. Thankful that their family endured the disaster unscathed, they were filled with a complete sense of grief over their loss as well as apprehension at the thought of having to rebuild their home life from ground zero. They gathered with their neighbors seeking comfort and consolation. How would you describe a needy person?

As Jack peruses the aisles of the Acme Tools store his eye catches the ultimate drill on display. He picks it up in his hands, almost caressing it as if a genie will pop out of it and grant all his wishes. He admires the specs, features and power he is holding in his hand, all the while thinking, "I need this drill!" After all, it does have features which the four other drills in his toolbox at home do not have. How would you describe a needy person?

When you pray "Give us this day our daily bread" in the Lord's Prayer, for what specifically are you asking? The meaning of this petition confesses that our daily bread comes from God and we are asking God to "lead us to realize this and receive our daily bread with thanksgiving." Then it explains "what is meant by daily bread": "Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and **needs** of the body." An

extensive list of “needs of the body” are everything from food and possessions to relationships, behaviors and character traits listed in that meaning. However, the list is not inclusive as it ends with the words, “and the like.” It too realizes the relativity of “needs” in the lives of individuals . . . like six drills or thirty pairs of shoes?

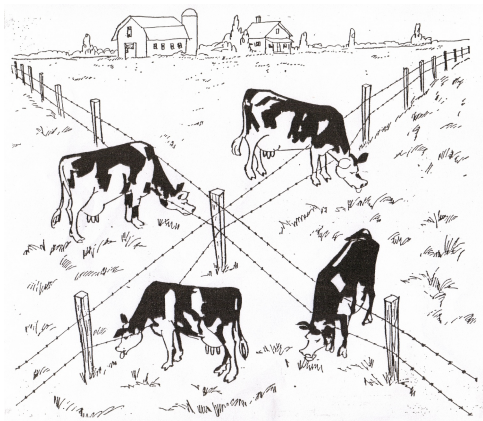
Interesting how “need” is so relative in the midst of various contextual variables. Circumstances, choices, relationships, life perspectives and culture come to play in determining “need,” many times creating a fine line between need and greed. Of utmost importance with either dynamic is the characteristic of contentment.

In his “thank you” letter to the Christians in Philippi Paul rejoiced in the ways that they helped out with his needs, supporting his ministry. These Christians from Macedonia were very eager to support Paul in his ministry, both in regards to his own needs (cf. Philippians 4:14-16) which helped him meet the needs of others as well (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:1-4). This letter is more positive than many of his other letters in the New Testament *because of their partnership in the gospel from the first day onward* (cf. Philippians 1:5). Many of his other letters had to deal with conflict resolution, exhortation against listening to false teacher and other problems. Philippians is his joy and thank you letter.

Meeting peoples’ needs by human care is not unique to the Christian Church. Human care happens by people all the time, even by those who

live in the darkness of their sin, without Christ in their lives. After all, Jesus did refer to such constant needs when He said, *you always have the poor with you* (cf. Matthew 26:11). When the Christian Church does human care it serves to open a door to meet their spiritual needs by bringing the Good News of forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus to them. This was the primary purpose for these Philippian Christians helping Paul. His primary work was to meet the spiritual needs of others **in Christ**.

Our text reveals Paul reminding them as he thanked them about the Source of contentment in our lives. Contentment is a challenge for sinners because of greed which brews in every person's sinful heart. This is a major challenge while living in the midst of **both** need and plenty.



I have a picture I use often in counseling and teaching. It depicts four cows, each with its head sticking through the barbed wire fence to eat the grass in the other cow's pasture. It compliments the cliché, "The grass is always greener on the other side." Discontentment carries with it the delusion that everyone else has it better. It is based upon greed rather than need.

Greed happens when your needs are being provided and you still

never feel you have enough. It can lead to hoarding or buying something just so that someone else can't get it or trying to fill a spiritual "hole" through material means somehow. Greed also happens when you think you need something so badly that you'll do anything to get it, even if it means compromising your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Colossians 3:5 simply calls greed *idolatry* (NIV). Greed is the sin of idolatry in the midst of God's providing for our needs of body and soul, which leads to discontentment, complaining and unthankfulness.

As Paul received the gracious gift from the Philippian Church graciously, sent through Epaphroditus (cf. Philippians 4:18), he made it clear that he was not *speaking of being in need* (verse 11). He recognized that their giving was motivated by all their needs having been met by *God . . . according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus* (cf. Philippians 4:19). Describing their generosity toward the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in 2 Corinthians 8:5, he recognized the Source of their gifts and partnership in this ministry: *they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to him and others.*

Thus, the physical circumstances actually are not the focus of your need. Whether you are *brought low* (i.e. humbled in some fashion) or *abound* (i.e. succeed in some way), the key is to **learn** *in any and every circumstance . . . the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need with contentment.* The "secret" is revealed in verse 13 of our text:

I can do all things through Him Who strengthens me.

You see, contentment in the midst of physical circumstances happens when you recognize that you are a very, very needy person . . . before God. Along with the sin of greed are so many other sins which pour forth from your heart which lead to ungratefulness, complaining and even unbelief. It is in the midst of this need that God has provided you with the ultimate expression of His **grace** in your life so that you can have a proper expression of thanks **by giving God thanks and glory through faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.**

Repentance in the midst of your need for forgiveness of sins and faith in the Person & Work of Jesus Christ move you from simply gratitude to praise! As a result of God's wonderful grace poured out upon us needy sinners through His Word and Sacraments we can also live in contentment, confessing that *God will supply every need of ours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus* (cf. Philippians 4:19), with the desire to help meet the needs of others in gratitude to Christ. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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