

The Grace of Gratitude

Seminar 2 – For richer, for poorer

❖ **Proverbs 30:8-9 – Two dangers**

*Keep falsehood and lies far from me;
give me neither poverty nor riches,
but give me only my daily bread.
Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you
and say, 'Who is the Lord?'
Or I may become poor and steal,
and so dishonour the name of my God.*

1. For richer - The dangers of prosperity

❖ **Material blessings are gifts from a generous God**

- **James 1:17** - Every good gift comes from God.
- **1 Timothy 6:17** - God is not mean – He gives us all things richly to enjoy.
- **Colossians 2:20-23** - The Bible condemns false asceticism.
- However God does **not** promise material prosperity.

❖ **Prosperity can suffocate gratitude**

- **Deuteronomy 8:10-20** – Prosperity can make us forget God:
 - ⇒ We love the gift rather than the giver.
 - ⇒ We conclude that our prosperity is the result of our own efforts.
 - ⇒ We break God's commandments.
- **Psalms 52:7** - We forget God and make riches our stronghold.
- Our confidence, trust and contentment is placed in what we possess rather than who possesses us.

❖ **Prosperity can be the doorway to sin**

- **Daniel 4:28-37** - It leads to foolish and ill-founded pride.
- **2 Samuel 11:1-5** - It leaves us open to temptation
- **Revelation 3:14-22** – It causes us to lose our spiritual perception

❖ **What can we do to deal with the dangers of prosperity?**

2. For poorer - The dangers of adversity

❖ Poverty may be a difficult experience for the people of God

- **Proverbs 30:8-9** - We may sin in order to meet our material needs.
- **Psalms 73:2-3** - We can become jealous and stumble because of the prosperity of others, particularly the prosperity of *“the wicked”*.
- **2 Timothy 4:10** – Desiring the things of the world may cause us to fall away.
- We may be tempted towards covetousness and envy.
- We may become resentful towards God and doubt His goodness.
- We may be paralysed with anxiety and fear.
- We may be tempted to believe the prosperity gospel.

❖ Revelation 2:8-11 – Remember the church in Smyrna

• Christ’s assessment

- ⇒ **2:9** - He knows because he is near.
- ⇒ Afflictions, poverty and slander – *“yet you are rich!”*

• Christ’s assurances

- Turn your eyes upon Jesus:
- ⇒ **2:8** - Christ has risen.
- ⇒ **2:10** - Christ is reigning.
- ⇒ **2:11** - Christ will rescue.

❖ The Bible says a lot about anxiety. So why do we still worry?

3. Philippians 4:1-13 – Godliness with contentment

1) Work at relationships (1-3)

❖ Build godly relationships

- **4:1** - We belong to a close-knit family.
- *“Stand firm”* - We face a cunning, persistent and malicious foe.
- **4:2-3** - It is difficult to be grateful when our lives are poisoned by bitterness.
- Forgive as Christ has forgiven and be a peace-maker.

❖ Be a blessing to others

- **2 Corinthians 1:3-6** – God pours in suffering and comfort to make us channels of blessing.
- God uses our trials to equip us to bless others.
- Do not waste your trials.

2) Rejoice in the Lord (4-5)

❖ We are commanded – “Rejoice...”

- **Galatians 5:22-23** - Joy is not an optional extra. It is the mark of a normal Christian life.
- Joy is based on a deep-seated confidence in God’s character and purposes.
- **Nehemiah 8:10** - Joy gives us credibility, energy and magnetism.

❖ We are directed – “...in the Lord”

- Paul was a “*Christ intoxicated man*”.
- **Phil 1:21** – Christ is everything to Paul in both life and death.
- **Phil 2:5** – Christ’s mind controls Paul, making him humble and grateful.
- **Phil 3:7-11** – Christ is the great reward which Paul longs to receive.
- **Phil 4:13** – Christ enables Paul “*to do all things*” which conform to His will.

❖ Acts 16:25 – The response to confusing circumstances

- Richard Wurmbrand – What we can lose; what we cannot lose.
- “*Glorify God and enjoy Him for ever.*” God will never disappoint you.
- Rejoicing will lead to a gentle, self-controlled, satisfied spirit.

❖ Remember that Christ is near

- **Isaiah 43:1-4** - He is near us in space.
- **Philippians 3:20-21** - He is near us in time.

3) Pray about all your needs (6-7)

❖ Negative

- Life can be difficult. Do not be anxious about anything
- Anything means anything!
- Is this the impossible imperative? No – both trust and worry are choices.
- **John 14:1,27** – “*Let not your hearts be troubled.*”
- **2 Kings 19 :14** – Think of Hezekiah’s prayer.

❖ Positive

- Turn your worry list into your prayer list
- **Prayer** – This word mean “*to come before God’s face.*”
- **Petition** – This refers to humble and earnest desire.
- **Thanksgiving** – This changes our whole perspective in prayer.
- **Requests** – We are to bring specific issues to God.

❖ Find God’s peace in Christ

- **1 Peter 5:7** – “*Cast all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.*”
- **Matthew 11:28** – Jesus is a refuge for the weary and worn.
- **Psalms 26:3** - “*You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!*”
- “*Peace is the conscious possession of adequate resources*”

4) Discipline your mind (8-9)

❖ Control what you think about

- There is a battle for our minds.
- **Rom 12:1-2** – We are to have renewed minds.
- **1 Peter 1:13** – “*Gird up the loins of your mind*”.
- You can control what you think about – develop holy habits of thanksgiving.

❖ **Paul's test**

- Is it true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable excellent or praiseworthy?
- These attributes are found supremely in Christ.
- A cacophony of voices surround us. Pain, people, the church, and our emotions all clamour to be heard. Who will you listen to and trust?
- **Psalm 42:5,11** – The Psalmist talks to himself.
- *“We write our blessings in the sand; we chisel our complaints into marble.”*

5) Cultivate a contented and thankful heart (10-13)

❖ **Paul is grateful for their concern**

- **4:10** - Generosity is a defense against the pitfalls of poverty and prosperity.
- **2 Cor 8:2-3** – *“In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.”*

❖ **Paul is satisfied with Jesus**

- This world is dominated by desire - *“If only...”*
- Paul has learned another way to live.
- He experienced prosperity and poverty.
- **4:11-12** – He refuses to tie his contentment to his circumstances.
- **4:13** – He ties his contentment to Christ.

❖ **Learn to hold things lightly**

- We are pilgrims here - life is like a bridge.
- All our joys and all our sorrows are temporary.
- **Ecclesiastes 2:24; 3:12-13** - Enjoy the temporal blessings that God gives.
- Rejoice in what you have rather than grieving over what you have lost.

❖ **Think about heaven**

- **Philippians 3:12-14** - Forget what is behind and press on to what is ahead.
- **Luke 10:17-20** – We are to rejoice that our names are written in heaven.

❖ **The gospel is Jesus**

- Where is your heart?
- **Jeremiah 2:13** – The riddle of the sands.
- If you give all to follow Jesus - you get Jesus!

- ❖ **1 Timothy 6:6** – *“Godliness with contentment is great gain.”*
What blessings does contentment bring?