



Contentment > Containers

Encounter Prayer:

Dear Loving God,

We give you thanks for today and all that we have because we know that you are our source and provider. Please work in our hearts and increase our capacity to love you and our neighbors more. We lift up those who are in quarantine and those who have been economically impacted by this pandemic. By your grace and mercy provide healing and essentials for those in need. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray, Amen!

Encounter God:

Where have you seen God at work in your life this week?

Encounter Neighbor:

What good have you done for someone else this week?

Encounter Scripture: *Philippians 4:11-13 Common English Bible (CEB)*

¹¹I'm not saying this because I need anything, for I have learned how to be content in any circumstance. ¹²I know the experience of being in need and of having

more than enough; I have learned the secret to being content in any and every circumstance, whether full or hungry or whether having plenty or being poor. ¹³I can endure all these things through the power of the one who gives me strength.

A Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition (UMH #607)

"I am no longer my own, but thine. Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt. Put me to doing, put me to suffering. Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee, exalted for thee or brought low for thee. Let me be full, let me be empty. Let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal. And now, O Glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it. And the covenant which I have made on earth, Let it be ratified in heaven. Amen."

Every Communion Sunday during the traditional worship service we recite the words of the Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition. When I recite those words, I am convicted because I do not want to suffer, be brought low, or be empty. Those are circumstances that I want to avoid. I was

not brought up in poverty, but my mother and I lived paycheck to paycheck. My mother's 1977 Ford Granada was in such bad shape there was rusted out hole in the floorboard. We lived in a duplex owned by a kind-hearted landlord that allowed my mother to be late on the rent around Christmas because it was the only way my mother would have enough money to buy me toys. I was aware of this arrangement since it was my job to take the rent check down to our landlord's house. When I needed football equipment for YMCA football, my uncles paid for it. I received gently used clothing that my cousins in Michigan had outgrown. We were not poor, but we were poor adjacent.

I know my story is not unique, many have experienced similar situations many more have experienced much worse. While that is true, it doesn't change the fact that for better or worse my circumstances have shaped who I am. For much of my life, I had a fear of losing everything that I have worked to acquire. It was hard for me to imagine being content while experiencing difficult circumstances. I am sure that I am not the only one. Recently, I have had some dark nights of the soul, but the light of God has provided clarity. I learned fear will keep us from entering the place of promise that God has for our lives. God has given all believers incredible power to endure all things. Being content does not mean being thrilled with your circumstances but does mean having an ease of mind. We can have ease of mind because we know that God will bring us through the pandemic, unemployment, illness, or whatever comes our way. God will bring us through those things and bring us into our place of promise.

Paul is imprisoned while writing this letter to the Philippians. Paul gives thanks in this part of the letter. Paul thanks the Philippians for their financial contributions to his missionary work and for sending Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus is sent to be Paul's personal assistant, take care of Paul's financial needs, and to help spread the gospel. Epaphroditus worked extremely hard, almost to the point of death. As a result, Paul sent him back to Philippi. Paul wanted to spare embarrassment to Epaphroditus and the church at Philippi. So, he thanks them for their act of generosity. Here is my modern-day translation:

Thanks for the help. The guy you sent was awesome, but he almost died. So, I sent him back. Do not worry about me. Although I am in prison, I am fine because God has given me the power to endure all circumstances. Do not feel bad that it did not work out. I know you tried. Trust me. I am fine.

Thanks again,

Paul

Paul is content or has an ease of mind because he trusted God. We need to trust God in the same way. Having people in our lives like Epaphroditus and the entire community of believers who are actively praying for us and supporting us is a huge blessing. However, there are times in our lives when our well-intentioned friends will not be able to help us. The good news is that God is always present and ready to help us.

Encounter Heads:

Define contentment in your own words?

What is the secret to contentment?

With whom do you best identify, Paul or Epaphroditus? Why?

What was the most impactful thing that you learned from the sermon, sermon guide, podcast, or video?

Encounter Hearts:

Share a time when the good intentions of friends and family fell short of helping you overcome a difficult circumstance. What did you learn about God? What did you learn about yourself? What did you learn about others?

Why is it so hard to be content when we experience difficult circumstances?

Encounter Hands:

Did you cause harm in word or did to someone this week? (self-examination). If so, confess your sin to God, then seek to reconcile with your brother or sister.

Share your prayer concerns and celebrations.

Ask a member of the group to pray for the concerns and give thanks for the celebrations.

Notes Sections

Prayer Concerns:

Celebrations:

Daily Reflection Questions

Where have I seen God at work in my life today?

What is one thing that I am thankful for?

What is one thing that broke my heart today?

What is one good thing did I do for someone else today?