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The Bible According to Me- Philippians 4:13

Philippians 4:13

“For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.”

With the 7th pick in the 2009 NBA draft, the Golden State Warriors of the National Basketball Association selected Stephen Curry from Davidson University. In his 13 years playing as a professional basketball player, Stephen Curry has accomplished much - winning 4 NBA championships including this past season in which he also won the finals Most Valuable Player award. During his time with the team, Golden State has consistently been one of the better teams over the past decade and on an individual level, Stephen Curry has been selected to multiple all-star teams, holds two regular season scoring titles and 2 league wide MVP awards, but it is from distance at the 3-point line that Stephen Curry has become legendary and has shaped a generation of basketball players who want to shoot the ball from the logo like Steph. Just this past year in December of 2021 Stephen Curry became the all-time NBA three point shot leader with 3,117 shots made...and he's still going. His accomplishments on the basketball court are truly astounding and reveal what hard work, dedication and determination can accomplish.

What is also interesting about Stephen Curry is what he writes on his signature pair of Under Armour shoes. He writes “I can do all things...” which is in reference to Philippians 4:13 from the Bible which states fully, “*I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.*” In an interview about why he chooses to write these verses on his shoes, Curry says this, “*It’s a mantra that I live by and something that drives me every single day. It’ll hopefully*

inspire people to find something that drives them, whether that’s a verse or some other motivating force that keeps you hungry and keeps you driven. That’s mine, and you can pick whatever yours is and let that drive you, too, as you continue with basketball or whatever field you’re in in your life.”

Curry says that this verse pushes him to achieve greatness each and every day. And the truth is that Stephen Curry has many accomplishments that back up his life verse – and without a doubt I am sure that this incredibly popular and well-loved verse of the Bible has motivated many others to work hard and never give up on their own personal hopes, goals and dreams. But what do we really know about this verse tucked away in the final chapter of the apostle Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi? Was Paul motivating the church, trying to rally the troops and inspire the community of faith to work harder, double down on the determination and accomplish great things for the kingdom of God?

Welcome to another week in our summer sermon series called “**The Bible According to Me... (mis)understanding Scripture.**” For the past number of weeks, we have been exploring some pretty well known verses in the Bible and digging in a little deeper into their context to see what we can learn about what these verses really mean and how we can perhaps more accurately apply them to our lives. And if you’ve been following along with us, you will undoubtedly know by now that context is very important when it comes to understanding Scripture. I remember a professor of mine in seminary who often told us in class, that “*a text taken out of its context, leaves you with a con.*” Let me say that again, *a text, taken out of its context, leaves you with a con.* Now here’s the thing about a con.... it’s not a flat out lie...I mean it can be, but not necessarily. Often cons are effective in their deception because they hold some element of truth in them, but often a con is a half-truth or an unfinished truth that mis-leads and creates misunderstanding. Which brings us to our verse today.

Philippians 4:13

“I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.”

In today’s performance driven world of faster, better and more...it can be easy to see how Stephen Curry and many others can use it as a motivational

tool to try harder, to do better, to accomplish more and to achieve greatness whether it be in sports, at school, at work. Do your best, always strive to be better and work hard at being the best you that you can be...never give up...you can do it...after all you can do anything through Christ who gives you strength. On the surface it certainly isn't a harmful message, but it's not the message that Paul is giving to the church. So, let's read this verse in context and see what we can learn today about this amazing piece of truth found in the word of God.

Philippians 4:10-14

How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but you didn't have the chance to help me. Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. Even so, you have done well to share with me in my present difficulty.

First, notice how we are in the tail end of chapter four, the final chapter of Paul's letter to the church in Philippi. Paul has already covered much of his most important instructions on Christian life and conduct to the church in the proceeding three and a half chapters. And in this section, Paul is closing his letter with a word of thanks to the church in Philippi for a gift that they sent to him. You see Paul is writing this letter from prison in Rome. For the past number of years, he has been moving throughout the Roman Empire telling people about Jesus and starting churches all over the place – including in the city of Philippi. In this past year, our young adults group here at North Park studied this book of Philippians with teacher Jo Saxton on Right Now media – a great study if you are interested in digging deeper into this amazing letter. What we learned together was that Paul has a long history with this church in Philippi, a community of faith that was very near and dear to his heart. And over the years he has stayed in touch with them, through the ups and the downs of life, encouraging them and praying for them. And now, in a specific time when Paul is in need, when his mission seems

to have stalled, when he is most likely discouraged and alone, his dear friends from the church in Philippi sends him a gift -- this time they are the ones who are encouraging him and praying for him.

So in verse ten, Paul praises God because they have shown concern for him, they have done an encouraging thing to send him this gift...but then he is quick to assure them that they shouldn't worry about him, he's not in as much need as they perhaps fear. Paul assures them he is OK. Why? Because he has learned to be content with whatever he has and in whatever situation he finds himself in. Whether he has a lot or a little, on a full stomach or on an empty one – Paul says he has learned the secret of living in every situation with contentment. And so, it is on the heels of this idea of being content, despite the realities of his imprisonment that Paul makes the claim, *I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength.*

Contentment isn't a very popular notion or attribute in today's high-achieving, performance driven society. Finding contentment is often a struggle because we live in a world of constant comparison with others around us. Many of you may be familiar with the saying, "*Keeping up with the Joneses*". It's a saying that comes from a comic strip from the early 1900's that depicted the attempts of the McGinis family to achieve, to accomplish and to have everything in life that their neighbours, the Joneses, had. It was their constant covetous comparisons to their neighbours that left them feeling like what they had wasn't enough, and so, because they were not content with what they had – the McGinis family was always in search of more and better.

Today there is an acronym that captures this exact same sentiment: FOMO. It stands for **Fear Of Missing Out**. FOMO causes a lot of anxiety, isolation and loneliness in many people's lives today particularly because of social media that has expanded our spheres of comparison exponentially. It isn't just the Joneses next door that we compare ourselves to, it's everyone posting on social media and there are a lot of people posting on social media from friends and family, to celebrities, to full-time influencers. Constantly seeing what the world is up to, what others are doing, experiencing and achieving leads to a lot of comparison, it's a lot of pressure and it's having a big effect on our societal

mental health as many people feel like we are missing out in some way on the best that life has to offer us. FOMO at its core is a message of discontentment. It leaves us with the pervasive feeling that our lives don't measure up, that we're not good enough, smart enough, rich enough, pretty enough, strong enough, we haven't travelled enough, experienced enough...you name it. Living our lives with FOMO and keeping up with the Joneses does not lead to a of contentment.

So what does? What is this secret to learning how to live in every situation, as Paul says, with contentment? Whether we are living with a lot, or living with a little. Whether we may feel like we're winning or losing. Whether we are healthy or sick, rich or poor, is there really a secret to finding contentment? Don't you just wish Paul would spell it out? Well, verse 13 in many ways is the key that unlocks this mystery of contentment and it isn't about finding the motivation to push yourself harder, to achieve more and ultimately accomplish greatness. It's a verse about contentment regardless of the situation or circumstance you find yourself in. It's about accepting what is, trusting God for what is to come and being thankful through it all.

I want to spend the rest of our time today unpacking these three ideas. I'm going to apply them specifically to Paul's life within the context of his letter to the Philippians, and as I do, I encourage you to think about how these statements can be applied to your lives as well. So first off – contentment starts with the ability to accept what is. Remember Paul is in prison, he has been arrested for telling people about Jesus and he is awaiting trial, judgement and sentencing. He is not sure exactly what his future holds, and as he sits in prison, certain abilities and freedoms that he once knew are limited and restricted. Since his dramatic conversion to Christianity on the road to Damascus, Paul's life has been travelling abroad, telling crowds of people about Jesus, starting new churches – getting them established and then moving on to do it all over again. He used to be free to travel, to pursue his mission and start new churches, but now, he is in a Roman prison, uncertain of when or even if he will ever be released. He is living with limitation and a lack of freedom and control.

I'm not sure if you have ever heard of the serenity prayer. It's a prayer from the early to mid 1900's

that has struck a chord with many people over the years and specifically gained a lot of traction with those struggling with addiction. It's a prayer about accepting limitations and finding serenity (or peace) in the midst of a difficult situation. It says this: *God grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference*

Some things we can change, and other things we cannot and this prayer encourages us towards serenity and in the direction of contentment by learning to accept the things we cannot change, finding the courage to change the things we can and perhaps most importantly the wisdom to know the difference. You see, Paul understands that his life is limited in this moment of imprisonment. He understands that there are some things about his situation that he cannot change. But Paul also realizes that some things are still in his control – there are still some things he can do. And so, armed with that wisdom and with courage to live within the limitations of his current circumstance - Paul accepts what is and chooses to live courageously by faith within those limitations. If we flip back in our Bibles just a page or two we read this in Philippians chapter 1 and verses 12-14.

Philippians 1:12-14

And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear.

Paul accepts the things he cannot change about his situation - he is in prison. But Paul also chooses to courageously change the things he can, and so he changes his perspective on his situation from limitation to possibility. Is it filled with limitation - yes? Does it still hold possibility and promise -yes? Contentment is not complacency. Accepting what is doesn't mean giving up or giving in. Accepting what is doesn't mean that things shouldn't change, won't change or can't change. I'm sure Paul would have much preferred to be free, but in this situation, Paul accepts that fact that he is in prison, but he does not then sit back. Rather he leans in and finds

the way to change the things he can and as a result the whole palace guard have heard about Christ and other believers have gained confidence to speak boldly God's message without fear. Contentment isn't about complacency – it's about accepting what is and courageously choosing to live with purpose and faith no matter what situation or circumstance you find yourself in. Contentment isn't found in living out our idea of what the ideal life looks like or achieving the dreams we have for tomorrow – contentment is found in accepting the realities and limitations of today and making the choice to live purposefully and courageously in them.

Contentment comes when we learn to accept what is and when we learn to trust God for what is to come. Paul had no idea what was to come from his imprisonment: will he be released, will he remain imprisoned, will he face execution? The end result is unknown, but what Paul does know is that he can trust in God no matter what comes...for he has come to learn that through it all – the good, the bad and the ugly, God is always faithful. This is what Paul has come to learn in his life and ministry and this is what he has learned to trust. So, when Paul says that he can do all things through Christ, or in Christ – he is making the choice to trust not in himself, his ability, his skill, or his effort – but to trust in Christ...and when Paul encourages people to trust in Christ, he also encourages them to live like Christ.

Living like Jesus and being imitators of Jesus is a central theme in Paul's letter to the Philippians. In fact, in chapter two Paul spends a number of verses on this very idea as he instructs the believers with these verses.

Philippians 2:5-11

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

*Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.
Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.
When he appeared in human form,
he humbled himself in obedience to God
and died a criminal's death on a cross.*

*Therefore, God elevated him to the place of
highest honor
and gave him the name above all other
names,
that at the name of Jesus every knee
should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the
earth,
and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ
is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

To live more like Jesus, we must take on the attitude of Jesus. And what is the attitude of Jesus? Well, according to these verses, the attitude of Christ is dominated by two main characteristics – humility and obedience. Though Jesus was God – He did not think of equality with God as something to cling to, instead He humbled Himself and in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on the cross. It certainly doesn't seem like Jesus lived the ideal life does it? Not much fear of missing out happening here. If anyone in all of history could have confidently claimed "I can do all things" ...it would be Jesus. And yet, Jesus lived His life in service to humanity, humbling himself and being obedient to God.

Humility and obedience, much like contentment, are not the most popular of personality traits in today's high-achieving, performance based world. Instead of living a life of privilege, status and power – Jesus chooses humility and obedience and service. In living His life of obedient service, and in facing the criminals cross, Jesus was content. He accepted what was and most importantly He trusted God for what was to come. And what was to come? Well we see that ultimately Jesus is elevated to the place of highest honor and given the name above every other name. But notice this – rather than using His power or privilege to achieve it, Jesus chose to trust and so He humbled himself and lived a life of service and obedience. Paul lives this out as well, filled with uncertainty, He chooses to remain humble, remain obedient and trust in God for whatever may come.

And here's the thing – learning to trust in Jesus, and learning to live with humility and obedience requires us to play the long game. It will require perseverance and endurance and patience. I think one of the reasons why we struggle so much with

contentment in our world, is because we have come to expect results to come quickly and easily. To go back to Stephen Curry and his record setting 3,117 three pointers made, we must also look at his attempts.

In his professional career he has shot 7,290 three pointers. And these stats don't show the thousands and thousands of shots he has taken in practice over his lifetime. Stephen Curry has actually missed more shots than he has made. He can't really do all things, he can't make all the shots he takes, but he can improve, he can learn how to be a better shooter. When someone begins learning to play basketball, they can't start with the three pointer, you have to play the long game. You have to work on your strength, your accuracy, your conditioning, your shooting form and this doesn't quickly come together after one afternoon on the basketball court. Becoming a great shooter like Stephen Curry will take a great amount of humility and obedience and perseverance.

The same principle is at work in our efforts to embrace the attitude of Jesus and be more Christ-like in our lives. We deeply value this work at North Park and we call it life transformation. It's one of our six core values. Last week we talked a bit about our core value of community. Well here is our core value of life transformation which means always growing to be more like Jesus, allowing Him to transform our motives, thoughts and actions. This will require from us a lot of humility, a lot of obedience and a lot of perseverance as we seek transformation to live more like Jesus Christ.

You see, perseverance has a lot to do with contentment. Paul knows this, he has lived it and he continues to live out this process of trust as he seeks to live with humility and obedience while sitting in a Roman prison

Philippians 3:12-14

I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and

receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

Paul presses on. He perseveres in his own life, he hasn't achieved perfection, he hasn't arrived spiritually, but he presses on towards a fuller transformation trusting in Jesus every step of the way. There are no quick fixes here, no short cuts or instant results. It's the long game of life transformation. Another wonderful verse from this letter to the Philippians is found in chapter one and verse six.

Philippians 1:6

And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

This is a verse about perseverance and trusting God for what comes. Paul reminds the Philippians that God is still at work in their lives, to trust the process, to keep working on being more like Jesus in each and every situation, each and every day. After all, transformation doesn't happen in a moment, but in a series of moments lived in humble obedience to God.

A third key to finding contentment in all situations and circumstances of life is thankfulness. In Paul's statement I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength, Paul acknowledges the gift of strength that is given by Christ. While the verse begins with a personal claim that "I can do all things" it ends with the recognition that it is through Christ and the strength Christ has given that makes it possible. The power behind Paul's confident statement is not found in Paul but in Christ who gives to him the gift of strength. Notice that God does not give Paul the gift of freedom, or victory or success. What He gives is the gift that is most needed in the long process of transformation into Christ likeness, the gift of strength. The ability to endure, to carry on, to persist and to hold onto hope regardless of life's situation or circumstance.

Philippians 4:13 is not a verse that promises personal accomplishment, achievement or success. It is a verse that promises strength for the journey. It's a strength that first and foremost comes from Christ, but it is also a strength that comes from a supportive, caring, community of faith.

Remember how we said that these verses in chapter four are found in the closing of Paul's letter to the Philippians. The Philippian church had heard that Paul as in prison and their hearts went out to him, they wanted to help and so they sent him a gift. We don't know exactly what the gift was, but this is what it says in

Philippians 4:18

"At the moment I have all I need – and more! I am generously supplied with the gifts you sent me with Epaphroditus. They are a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to God."

Paul's heart is given strength because of Christ, but also because of the encouragement of his dear friends from the church in Philippi who sent him a gift.

Paul is in prison but he is not alone. His statement that I can do all things is not a declaration of self-dependency or self-sufficiency, but rather it is the proclamation of thanksgiving that he is able to endure and persevere because he has the strength of Christ within him and the encouragement of the community of faith surrounding him. For I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength is verse 13 – but look at verse 14 that follows. It says, *"Even so, you have done well to share with me in my present difficulty"*. Paul essentially says, I can do all things through Christ, but even so, it was so nice to get your gift and know that I am a part of a supportive and encouraging community of faith. Thanks for thinking of me and sending me this gift. Paul's strength is found first and foremost in Christ – but even so, it was so nice to be encouraged by his dear friends in Philippi as well.

Contentment also comes through a heart of thankfulness. Rather than choosing to focus on the things we do not have and the things that aren't going right we can make a choice to give thanks for the things we do have and be grateful for the things that are going right. Now I'll be the first to admit that being thankful isn't always my natural instinct, especially when things aren't going right. I'm sure the same is true for all of you. Nevertheless, if we desire to live with greater contentment, we must learn to grow in our ability to be thankful.

An article I read recently that is published by kidshealth, says that there are three keys to grow in the practice of thankfulness: to notice, to savour and to express. And while the article looked specifically at developing habits of thankfulness in teens, I think these three practices of thankfulness are relevant to people of all ages.

One – **NOTICE** what you have to be thankful for. The article suggests writing out three things each day that you are thankful for (shelter, bed, food, nature, friends, sunshine, rain) – in other words take the time regularly to look around you and be aware of what surrounds you that you can be thankful for.

Two – **SAVOUR** – or absorb thankfulness. I love this idea. It takes the metaphor of a sponge and combines the act of noticing with intentional time of reflection. In the article they literally encourage teens to take the time to pause - to stop from the hurried what's next mentality we often find ourselves in and reflect and enjoy whatever it is that they are thankful for. In today's fast paced world we move so quickly from one thing to the next that we often forget this vital step in living thankful lives. How much contentment could grow in our hearts if we just stopped a little longer to absorb and savour the things in life that fill us with gratitude?

And thirdly, **EXPRESS** your thankfulness. Don't simply let it sit inside your own personal mind, heart and experience. Actually say it and share it with those around you. Saying thank you can be a lot more than having polite manners – expressing your thankfulness is a way of sharing joy and giving strength to others around you.

One more verse from the book of Philippians to drive this point home is found in chapter four.

Philippians 4:6-7

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

Sounds a lot like Paul's secret recipe to contentment doesn't it? What is Paul's secret to contentment? Well, according to **Philippians 4:13** it isn't about motivating yourself to dig deeper, work harder,

achieve more and accomplish greatness...it's about learning to endure and persevere through all of life's circumstances and realities. It's about becoming more like Jesus in humility and obedience. It's about accepting what is, trusting God for what is to come and learning to be thankful through it all.

Points to Ponder – Philippians 4:13

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. How do you see comparison or FOMO (fear of missing out) at work in your life and in the lives of those around you? How do you typically handle feelings of discontentment?
2. Read **Philippians 4:10-14**. What stands out to you about these verses that provide the context for the verse “*I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength*”?
3. One part of finding contentment is about accepting things that we cannot change. How does Paul use his imprisonment (something beyond his control) in the work God has called him to? Why is it hard for us to sometimes accept things we cannot change?
4. Discuss our North Park value of **Life Transformation** that says: *Always growing to be more like Jesus, allowing Him to transform our motives, thoughts, and actions*. What do you like most about this value? What do you find most challenging?
5. Of the three components of practicing to give thanks, which do you find easiest to do? Which one do you need to work on more?

NOTICE – observe, recognize

SAVOUR – enjoy, reflect

EXPRESS – share, affirm

6. What lessons in life and faith is God teaching you through this message that you can apply to your life this week?

Prayer and Action Item

Take a few moments and write down 3 things that you are thankful for in your life right now. Then, take 3 minutes with each item, close your eyes and give yourself time to truly appreciate them. Finally, write an email, send a text, or take some time to share with someone else what you are thankful for.