

Living a Tim Tebow Kind of Life

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Brian R. Wipf

You know you've made it when your name turns into a verb. That's what's happened to Tim Tebow. For those of you who don't know, Tim Tebow was a college and professional football player. These days he's been playing America's national pastime... baseball, in the minor leagues. Tebow professes faith in Jesus Christ and is not shy about it. I don't think he tried by he made *Tebowing* famous. That's how his name has become a verb - to *Tebow*. Can anybody show us how to *Tebow*?

In college, Tebow would write the Bible reference *Phil. 4:13* under his eyes for a game. Does anybody know what Philippians 4:13 says? "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

That's a favorite verse for a lot of people. Listen again, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." It's wonderful. But when Paul wrote those words he wasn't suiting up for a football game or a volleyball match. He also wasn't preparing for the ACTs or getting ready for a job interview. He had something else in mind. I'm not saying this precious verse can't be an encouragement during times like that, but that's not what Paul was going through when he wrote that verse. When read in it's original context, this verse becomes even more precious (READ Phil. 4:10-13).

Let me give you some background information to help you understand this passage better. The Apostle Paul, the writer of this passage, was a church planter. He had a burden, a calling, to spread the good news that Jesus Christ saves sinners to as many as possible. He sacrificed the comforts of a permanent home and community to travel all throughout the Roman world to help more people know God through Jesus Christ. And when people in various towns came to know and follow Jesus, the banded together as a new community - the church - to spread the message of Jesus to even more.

One of those towns that Paul visited was Philippi. You can read about Paul's work in Philippi in Acts 16; God did some amazing things. And a sweet fellowship and friendship began between Paul and this church family.

Fast forward a few years; Paul is now in jail because people didn't like that he was preaching Jesus Christ. When the Philippian church hears that Paul's in jail, they send him a gift of money; one of their members, Epaphroditus, is picked to deliver the gift to help Paul. Imagine: Paul is under Roman guard as a prisoner and Epaphroditus walks in, his old friend, and gives him a gift of money from the church in Philippi. Imagine the ecstasy, the joy, Paul must have felt. You can hear that joy from Paul in vs. 10 when he says, "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me." "They remember me!" Paul says. "They still care for me!" At such a low and discouraging moment in Paul's life as he's

under lock and key in a Roman jail he's able to say, "My friends in Philippi haven't forgotten about me and they are trying to help me." We learn in 2 Timothy the number of people who bailed on Paul leaving him alone and discouraged. But not the Philippians; oh, I rejoice in the Lord greatly that the care for me.

Will you remember that, friends? Will you apply this to your relationships with others? To be an instrument of encouragement in the life of someone when they are hurting, when they are discouraged, is such a sweet gift. I know you can't do it for everyone. I know that you have busy lives. But if you're too busy, if you're too focused on your life and your vacations and your interests where you are never a Philippian church, an Epaphroditus, bringing a word, a gift, in the low moments of other people's lives you're failing the calling our master has given us. Slow down a little, FBC, so you can help one or two of your brothers or sisters when life is hard.

So, Paul is kind of funny about money. He teaches a lot about money (he has no problem talking about it, teaching on it, and telling others to give their money away), but he's so careful about getting gifts from others. It's almost like he's paranoid that people will get the wrong idea, like that's his motivation when it's not. He says in vs. 11, "Not that I am speaking of being in need." He's saying, "Don't get the wrong idea; I'm not angling for your money." But to say, "I'm not in need?" Really, Paul? You're in jail. If you're in jail I think you can say, "Hey, I'm in need." Isn't that why they give you a phone call? To call a friend and say, "Hey, I could use your help!"

Why would Paul say that he wasn't in need? He gives us that answer in vs. 11; he says, "for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content." That's why I am not in need; it looks like I am in need. I am in jail after all. But I'm not actually. Why? Because I am content. Look further into vs. 12, "I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound." So, in the low times I am content (I know some of you are in the low times right now. Life is hard; you're struggling. There's help for you today). I am also content on the good days. Paul finished vs. 12 saying, "In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need." And that secret is contentment.

Contentment is the key; because he is content, Paul can sit in a prison cell and say, "I am not in need." So, what is that? And where does it come from? Can I have contentment that's even close to that? I want to. I don't want to be so impacted by my circumstances that I'm unhappy just because things aren't going my way. I don't want someone cutting in front of me at the grocery store, not qualifying for National Honor Society, the Doctor telling me I need more tests, my taxes going up, to be so impactful in my life. I don't want to be like a rudderless ship tossed from one wave of life to another wave; I don't want to be a victim to the unknowns of life that I can never find joy because my circumstances are difficult.

Might that be an important reality to embrace right now? Your circumstances will never be ideal. You'll never get to this point where everything is the way you want it to be. You'll never be perfectly healthy *with* perfectly fulfilling relationships *with* more resources than you need *with*

trouble-free neighbors, church, and automobiles *with* everything else that would make your circumstances ideal. That's not real life. You will always have areas in your life that you wished were different, that you wished aligned with your (unrealistic) expectations. This is what Paul is helping us cope with. He's helping us learn how to live our lives with joy when our circumstances are less than we wished them to be.

Let's define contentment. There isn't succinct definition in the Bible for contentment, so we have to put one together based on what we know from God's word. Let me give you a 1651 and a 2017 definition. First, from 1651. A man named Jeremiah Burroughs wrote a book called *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* and in it he defines contentment this way (I'll read it twice because it's rather long): *Christian Contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, freely submitting to, and taking complacencie (or comfort) in God's wise, and fatherly dispose in every condition.* I will put a link online so you know how to get Burrough's book... it's priceless. Now, here's a 2017 definition that your's truly put together that's a little simpler (but it's inspired by Burrough's definition): *Resting hopefully in God's decisions for my life.* That's contentment. I am content when I'm resting hopefully in God's decisions for my life. Let's look at that.

First, maybe the thing that jumps out at us the most is this idea that my circumstances are the result of God's decisions or choices for my life. That might rub someone of you the wrong way. Like Neo in the *Matrix*, we don't like to think we're not in control of our own lives. But are you? Are you in control of your life? Were you in control of when and where you were born? Who your siblings were? Whether your parents were loving and helpful or cruel and selfish? Were you in control if your parents were taken from you at an early age? Certainly, the early years of our lives and our experience with our families and parents was profoundly influential; and we weren't in control of that. Were you in control of your genetic make up, your personality quirks, and natural skills and interests? Someone else made those choices for us and that was God.

The scriptures teach that God mysteriously is the author of our life; that he has written our story. He's penned in the good times and the bad times; he wrote in our strengths and our weaknesses. He's dramatically included the relationships that have helped and hurt us. And he did all of this for a purpose and that purpose is revealed in Acts 17:26-27 (READ). Think of it: by his infinite power and incomprehensible wisdom, God determined, he decided when and where every person would live; listen again, "having determined allotted periods (that's the time) and the boundaries (that's the place) of their dwelling place." Think of it! Only an infinite God could do this.

But why would he do it; it says, "that they (you and me and everyone) should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him." You can't miss this friends or you'll never find contentment, you'll never rest hopefully in God's decisions for your life. God wrote your story like he did to lead you to himself. To bring you to a place where you'd experience the blessing of his presence; where you'd hear the good news that God forgives sins through Jesus

Christ. All your good and bad times, all your strengths and weaknesses, all your advantages and challenges were written into your life by God to lead you to himself. He did this out of love for you; true life is found in a relationship of faith in God. That's what he wants to give you. That's why he's authored your life. Don't believe that? You're here this morning! God loves you; he sent his son to die for your sins so you could be forgiven. You don't have to live estranged from God; you can be his son or daughter. Look how God brought you here to listen to this message today; he's authoring your life so you'd come to him.

Secondly, think of the word resting... contentment is *resting* hopefully in God's decisions for my life. I used one word (resting) when Burroughs used many; he said contentment is the sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit. That's a picture of a person who simply finds rest in God's decision for our lives. An opposite picture of that, if I can dare say it, might be our toddlers this morning. I love the toddlers of FBC and it's not lost on me that worshiping in the park is extra hard for them and for you parents. With all the fun and excitement of being outdoors, being in the park, being near toys, being in a crowd, I'm guessing many of them don't have a sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit... they have a, "Ooo, let's do this! And I'm tired of listening to him already!" Up and down. From one toy to the next. Can't sit still.

But that's how many of us live our lives. Can't sit still. Up and down from one activity to the next constantly looking to change our circumstances; always unhappy with what we have wishing we had something better. And, of course, accompanying all this is an anxious heart, restless heart. To be content means I rest in the reality that God has authored my life for my good.

There's one more word to my definition - hopefully. Contentment is resting *hopefully* in God's decisions for my life. Do you know why this word is important? It's because this is where faith comes in. True contentment is ultimately about you believing, having faith, that what God has given you is best. That's why we are so often not content, right? We look at our circumstances and we see all kinds of things that are wrong. I don't have enough money; I need to be healthier; I deserve a better wife; why do bad things always happen to me. We're not content with our circumstances because when we look at them with these eyes we don't believe we have what we need. That's why we need faith. You will only rest in your circumstances when you have a sure hope that God has written them in your life because they are what's good for you, because he loves you, because he's giving you exactly what you need.

Let me try and hit home with some of you right now. Some of you have bodies that are not working well. Your knees have been giving you fits for months, even years. And they're painful. Your blood pressure and cholesterol are too high and you're taking the doctor's advice about changing your diet, but you hate it and it's hard. Some of you are single and you wish you weren't. You thought you'd grow old with your spouse, but he is gone. You thought you would have found a spouse by now. You've tried to have a baby for years and nothing. And every glimmer of hope is extinguished. Marriage is hard. You're trying. But you feel your spouse

constantly comes up short. You feel cheated. You wish you had better friends at school. You don't want to compromise your principles, but you feel lonely.

That's all real life, right? Listen to what Paul says again: (vs. 11) "for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content." (Vs. 12) "In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need." Can you see a word that's found in both of these sentences? It starts with an "L". Do you see it? Paul *learned* this. Think of it: contentment wasn't downloaded by the Spirit into his heart or mind when he started following Jesus. It wasn't given to him by another person. He didn't get contentment by following a bunch of rules. And he didn't get contentment by drinking the water. He *learned* it. Do you know what that tells me? You can learn it, too. Paul was a man, a human being, just like you. There was nothing special about Paul as a person that makes you unable to have the same experience of contentment. You can learn it, too.

Hey, we're pretty good at that. We're good at learning. In fact, we're getting our kids ready to go to school to learn; we adults have all done that already. So, get you pencil sharpened; find a notebook. Let's learn contentment. Maybe that's what some of you are thinking is happening right now; you're thinking, "I'm learning contentment this morning at the FBC worship in the park." You're not learning contentment this morning; you're learning *about* contentment. You only learn contentment by practicing it. That's true about a lot of things, right? Driving. Playing basketball or volleyball or golf. Knitting. Cooking. You can read all the books you want about that stuff, right? And learn all about the rules of a sport, or the science of cooking, or the laws of the road and what your automobile can do. But you only learn how to play volleyball, you only learn how to cook, or how to drive when you actually do it.

I've tried to connect with you this morning about the low times I know many of you are going through right now. If you're a follower of Jesus, your gracious God is trying to teach you contentment. He's taking you to school right now. He's trying to show you that he has authored your life for your good. That he's given you the challenges, the weaknesses, the low times along with all the good stuff, too, for one ultimately gracious purpose. To lead you to himself. And he's trying to teach you how to rest in those moments. He wants you to learn how to have a sweet, quiet, inward, gracious frame of spirit when the waves of life are violent; he wants you to rest when everything feels chaotic. He's trying to teach you to have hope, to believe his promises, to trust his character, to have faith in his word and presence. So, maybe you're just realizing what God has been up to these last few months or years. He's teaching you contentment.

Friends, when you learn contentment, you can do it. Like Paul, you'll be able to say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Let's say that together.