

PAUL LEARNED CONTENTMENT - WE CAN TOO!

“ . . . I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances . . . ” (Phil 4:11)

William Glasser states that we learn:

- 10 % of what we READ.
- 20% of what we HEAR.
- 30% of what we SEE.
- 50% of what we SEE and HEAR.
- 70% of what is DISCUSSED with OTHERS.
- 80% of what is EXPERIENCED PERSONALLY.
- 95% of what we TEACH TO SOMEONE ELSE.

So, Paul “learned” contentment. We don’t know where he learned this lesson, but a good guess would be to start with his parents. Little children learn at an accelerated rate. Everyone knows that little children usually become fluent in a foreign language before their parents do. If Paul “saw and heard” contentment in his parents he would be half way toward graduation. If he “discussed” contentment and “experienced it personally”, he would be moving toward the head of the class. Now, as a prisoner in Rome, he was “teaching to someone else” the lesson of contentment. No wonder he had “learned to be content whatever the circumstances”.

The Greek word translated “learned” in this verse is “manthano”. It is associated with “mathetes” which means to be a disciple. Learning and discipleship are related. John wrote that only those who “learn” about Jesus can become His disciple (Jn. 6:45). Paul wrote that “learning” Christ has a positive affect on our behavior (Eph. 4:20). The book of Revelation teaches that the 144,000 who are the redeemed of the earth will “learn” a new song (Rev. 14:3). Even Jesus “learned” obedience by the things He suffered (Heb. 5:8)

A kindred word in the Greek language is “paideuo”. It is translated in the Scriptures as “learn”, but also as chasten, chastise, correct, instruct, and teach. It comes from “pais”, the word for child, and literally means to train a child. Parents know that chastisement is a part of the training process. The Scriptures refer to the chastening aspect of the Law and remind us that it was a “schoolmaster” (paidogogos) to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith (Gal. 3:24). In ancient times, school teachers as well as parents, used the rod of discipline to help students to learn.

God taught the Hebrew people to be thankful in much the same way that parents teach their children to be thankful. Thanksgiving to God is not an option, it is a command. God demanded thanksgiving, and parents can do the same! If children can learn to read and write, they can also learn to say “please”, “thank you” and “you’re welcome”. The N.T. Scriptures are even more demanding. Paul wrote by inspiration: “give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.” (1Thes 5:18)

If you did not learn contentment from your parents, do not despair, the Master Teacher still has a lesson plan especially designed for you. Some have suggested that God has a sense of humor for He invariably places us in circumstances that make us want to learn. For example, when God wanted His people to leave Egypt He raised up a Pharaoh who made them miserable (Ex. 1:8). When God wanted the pagans to leave Canaan He simply sent “hornets” to drive them out (Ex. 23:8). When Jonah rebelled God put him in the belly of a great fish for three days with sea weeds wrapped around his head (Jonah 2:5). The Prodigal Son learned the value of his home when was living with pigs (Lk. 15:16). Each of these examples was a teaching experience designed by God help people learn to do His will.

David wrote in Ps. 32:9 that we should not be like a horse or mule that do not have any understanding. Our loving Heavenly Father will teach us one way or the other. Horses and mules are hard headed and stubborn, and often learn only from pain and punishment. The Scriptures warn us not to be like them. Please remember that one of the greatest gifts you can bequeath to your children is to teach them by both precept and example the wonderful lesson of contentment!