

To this day Coca Cola Company claims the true recipe for its signature product is only known by a few employees. This trade secret is guarded so closely the original formula wasn't even written down. When it was that piece of paper was held in a bank vault first in New York, then in Atlanta until 2011. Now that paper sits in a special vault in the Coca Cola Company museum in Atlanta. Something guarded so closely you can be sure more than a few have tried to figure the secret out.

More than a few have tried to figure out the secret to contentment in life too. It seems like it shouldn't be that hard. Look at who you are on the inside and just be content with that. "Live and let live" because that's just the way it is. Or look at what you have on the outside and figure there's always more you could have. This is more of a "the one who dies with the most things wins" attitude on contentment. Neither will ever truly find the secret.

Coca Cola will never share the secret recipe. You'll never stumble upon the secret for contentment on your own. But that doesn't mean God wants you lost with no contentment at all. In fact through the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians God is going to share with you the secret to contentment. Prepare yourselves for knowledge that will change your life. Prepare yourself for something shocking that will give you contentment.

What's the secret?

The Philippian congregation was a model church. They were struggling financially but still they gave. When no other churches of Paul participated in sending a gift to the Jews in Jerusalem, the Philippians did. They continually sent gifts to Paul to where he had to tell them to stop because he couldn't accept more. But when the gifts stopped while Paul was in Rome he got worried. Whatever was holding them back eventually was removed. Paul was happy when the gifts started coming again. The Philippians were doing what they loved to do. Could it be that they had figured out the secret? Was the secret to give more than you get? Giving could feel so good that giving gifts might be the secret.

Listen to Paul, **"I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances."** Paul was trying to say thanks, but it sounded like a warning. Like, "Thanks for the gifts Philippians, but I'm doing just fine without them." True Paul was alone in a foreign city, and true he was preparing a defense before the courts that would mean his life, and true he was concerned that he hadn't received anything for a while from them. He appreciated the gifts, but most important wasn't the gifts but the giving. Paul was the receiver. So maybe Paul learned the secret. Paul learned to receive gifts with thanks. Learned he couldn't depend on gifts to survive. Could it be that Paul had figured out the secret?

If the secret is what the Philippians learned then giving is the best. It can feel good to give. There's a program on channel 4 at 10:00 pm called Pay It Forward. A deserving person who has helped others is nominated to receive \$400. All the people who give the money feel good about doing it and it seems to bring contentment. It certainly brings joy and often tears. The satisfaction, the pride, can't people just be content in giving? But giving strikes up jealousy or wanting what you're giving. It means shopping which often results in buying things for yourself? The secret to contentment isn't giving.

Maybe receiving is the secret, receiving not with greed but with a smile and thanks. Receiving seems much harder because it can become all about me and so being a good receiver must be part of contentment. We convince ourselves that we need to receive so others can learn giving. It gives them joy and I get joy too. But receiving does become self centered. Saying thanks becomes routine, not heartfelt. And did you feel content when you received your last big TV or tablet? Did you feel content with your last computer or car? Receiving isn't the secret to contentment either.

Nobody is born with contentment. That's no secret. Look at the crying baby that doesn't even say thanks. The toddler who points and grabs at everything in the store. The teenager who always wants gifts but barely ever gives. The adult who takes pride in giving the biggest or most expensive gifts. Nobody naturally is content. So what's the secret? How can we have contentment?

Paul knew the extremes life can throw at you. Up and down, rich and poor, warm and freezing, well fed and hungry. Paul knew it all. **"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want."** He lived on the opposite extremes of life and still learned contentment. But notice he learned it, he wasn't born with it. He didn't learn it through his tough life. He didn't learn it by getting knocked down and getting up again. Paul learned where contentment truly is found.

You might be living on either extreme. You might have so little that even the next meal is uncertain. You might be sitting here with the clothes on your back, but at home you know the closet is empty. You might check the bank account and find all zeros. Or you might look and be amazed at the choices and the stacks of food you have. You might look in the closet and see only a few inches where you could still buy more and put those too. You might check the high speed internet or your newest smart phone and call up the multiple bank accounts and find more than enough. It doesn't matter if you have a lot or a little, you'll never find contentment in giving, receiving, what you have, or what you don't have.

The secret Paul learned, the secret you and I will never stumble upon, the secret that can't be figured out but must be taught is this. Are you ready? Are you prepared? **"I can do everything through him who gives me strength."** Contentment for Paul, contentment for you and me, it only comes through Christ. You learn about Christ through the Word of God, the Bible. In the Bible contentment springs from knowing we're totally dependent on God, not ourselves. It's not self-sufficiency but God-sufficiency. Christ binds us to himself through the cross so we have forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness for jealous giving and pride or self centered receiving. Forgiveness comes through Christ's death and resurrection. It comes through an unchanging relationship with Jesus. We learn that everything is God's and everything is going away someday. Nothing material lasts so contentment must be found in something that will last. Jesus once told Paul about contentment and where Paul should find his strength, **"My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness."** God's grace to you in Christ is sufficient for you too. God's grace in Christ is the secret to your contentment.

Contentment from Christ will always have you looking different from other people who haven't learned the secret. They look elsewhere for contentment, but not you. When you receive gifts you're not only thankful to the person but you give thanks to God. When you face intense pressure to give in or give up in life you remain calm. When you're tempted to seek the pleasures of this world in sinful ways you stand up against them in God's power. When the world is worrying about the little things you don't because compared to being saved in Christ everything is little. When you give to church you give freely because you're not worried about spending money on what you don't need. When you endure hardships and suffering you still rejoice in your greatest treasure.

In January of 2011 the Coca Cola Company teased that they would release the secret formula. Hundreds, maybe thousands, froze that millisecond on their TV screens searching to get the secret. They never found it. Coca Cola will probably always keep their secret. God is telling you his. If you want contentment in this world, if you want a life free from worry and fear, if you want to be okay with having a little or having a lot of material goods then the secret shouldn't be a secret. Contentment is found in Christ alone. Have a relationship with Jesus and you'll find true contentment. That's the secret.