

Philippians 4:11

Week #8 in the Series “Whose Verse is it Anyway?”

Pastor David Woolverton - 8:30 Service

Well, good morning, everybody. It's good to be with you. Grace and peace in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. For those who are joining us for the very first time, either in person or online, my name is David Woolverton. I'm one of the Pastors here. And it is my joy to share with you the word of God today. Just as a reminder as to what was pulled out of the hat this morning. Our verse of scripture comes to us from Philippians 4:11. This is the Apostle Paul and he writes, I am not saying this because I am in need. For I have learned to be content. Whatever the circumstances, 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. I can do all this through Him Who gives me strength.

Would you join your hearts with me in prayer? Oh, Lord. Open us up to your word. And open your word up to us. Teach us, Lord, what you would have us learn as you conform our lives into the disciples that you have called us to be. All of this, Lord, I pray in Jesus mighty name. God's people say Amen.

Well, I dare say that I turned 60 just last Wednesday. And from what I hear, 60 is the new 59. I can say this with great confidence that I am a student of the good, the bad and the ugly. Maybe you are too. Over my 60 years, I can pretty much tell you story after story of all of the good that I have been given, all of the ways that God has blessed me immeasurably over those years. For example, I have been blessed to have been raised by two incredible parents. My parents were not wealthy, they were hard workers, sometimes working multiple jobs in order to take care of my family; I'm the youngest of my family, and my parents did whatever it took to make sure that we always had enough. Not an overabundance, but we always had food on the table, we always had clothes on our back, and my parents taught me the proverbial truths of scripture that it is more blessed to give than to receive. I am who I am because of what they gave to me over the years, not just tangibly, but the intangible. My character, my generosity, my ability to listen, my ability to reframe situations I got from my parents in one way or another. I have also been blessed with an incredible wife. Christine, for me is my spiritual and tangible hero. She makes me so much better than I am. Just ask her. She brings organization to my life, she brings joy to my step, and she brings deep meaning to who I am.

Clearly, I am a student of the good. I'm also a student of the bad. At the age of 41 I had a heart attack. Took me by surprise. I was not counting on that at age 41. But the Lord had

something in mind. You need to know that I at one point, especially early on in my journey of overcoming that heart attack and all its implications, I used to categorize that heart attack under the ugly term. But over the years, I have realized that I serve a God who never wastes anything. You've heard me preach that at least once or twice. Right? And this God who never wastes anything reminded me that He uses all things. even the things that are meant for evil, God repurposes for good. I am who I am today also because of what I went through and the learnings coming from that heart attack. It was not an easy journey, and I would not wish that on anybody else. But anybody who has ever gone through a situation like that you know that you're forever changed, not just because of the diet. Most of you don't know me as I used to be. But back then, I was 35 heavier than I am now. I've learned a lot. I've retraced a lot of my steps and changed the questions that I ask about myself and the questions that I ask about the Lord. God never wastes Anything. He never wastes a hurt. And then there's the ugly. Certainly, we have lots to be thankful for with the good and we can reframe the bad. But what do we do with the ugly? About a month ago My mom, who is the epitome of the giver, received a diagnosis of having cancer of the esophagus. She begins her treatments starting tomorrow, chemo and radiation. About a week and a half ago, my dad was diagnosed with having skin cancer. He's begun chemotherapy. All of this, happening right now - I classify as ugly because of all the whirlwinds that this will put my family through. I am a guy who likes fixing things. This is something I can't fix. But we serve a God who reminds us constantly that in all situations, the good, the bad and the ugly, He provides. When I hear these words from Philippians Chapter 4, I hear them deeply and personally. I hear them as words of hope. I hear them as a lifeline, dropped down in the midst of situations that may be very challenging, especially for those of us who tend to evaluate the good, the bad and the ugly from our vantage point rather than God's. Anybody else out there like me? As I know some of your stories, I know some of you would track with me in terms of the categories of the good, the bad and the ugly. Things that we can't explain, things that we cannot control. Life sometimes happens and life sometimes is unfair. Yet God is always good. I choose to believe that. And I really think the Apostle Paul did as well.

Now, I'm not going to go into great depths with the background of Philippians because ironically, in two weeks we're starting a brand new sermon series on the book of Philippians. So this is but a highlight, perhaps a teaser of what's yet to come. We are actually going to take a part this letter and walk through it together over the course of 20 total weeks. The first ten prior to Advent. Then we're going to focus in on a different message series for the season of Advent and Christmas. And then in January, we're going to come into Chapters three and four of Philippians and finish up in the following ten weeks. So, I'm not going to delve into this other than to tell you that Philippians is a very special letter. It's a letter that Paul is writing from prison. He's actually in prison. And if anybody could categorize their life from the vantage point of the good, the bad and the ugly, certainly Paul could. This is an individual servant of the most high who came very close to death multiple times because of what he was preaching for Jesus Christ. He was nearly stoned to death. He was always challenged and mocked. He was thrown into

prison multiple times. He was beaten severely, and that was only part of his story. And so when I hear some of the words that he writes to the Philippians, it's really important for us to get that larger context. He understands. And what he challenges me personally on, and maybe even all of us, is the understanding that when we say yes to Jesus, suddenly our life will be one big trip through a garden. That nothing bad will happen to us, and certainly nothing ugly can touch us because we are covered with the blood of Jesus. The reality is what we experience here in this human life is a reflection of the brokenness of humanity that tells the story of the why Jesus had to die. And the great gift of salvation that He brought with Him. And that salvation tells us a story that nothing, nothing that happens to us in this earthly life that we live can separate us from the incredible love of Jesus Christ. That there is a life that is yet to come that will make all questions disappear and all pain and all sorrow go away. And the promise of God, who we serve, who never wastes a hurt and who never wastes anything, is the promise that a day is coming when every tear will be wiped away. There will be no more mourning and no more pain. There will be a day when we will see loved ones that have passed away and we will be reminded that there is a joy that far surpasses the brokenness and pain that we feel today. Paul tells us that to give us hope, to live in the midst of the here and now with an eye on what is yet to come.

So let me take this verse and pull up just a little bit. In Verse 11, let me read this again with that little set up - Paul is bringing a close to the Philippians letter, and he's saying to those Philippians believers, Hey, I want to let you know that you really showed up at a time that I needed you. This is what he says, starting in Verse 10. I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I'm not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content, whatever the circumstances.

Let me pause there and just reflect with you a bit. Notice a couple of words that he's choosing to use here. Notice he's saying, I have learned to be content. I have learned what that means is that by nature, Paul was not one for whom being content came easily. I got to admit, I'm right there with him. Are you? Are you easily content regardless of your circumstances? If you are today it is because you have learned that spiritual discipline, that spiritual discipline of contentment does not come simply by waking up in the morning, seeing the sunrise and going, Hey, it's a great day. If you can do that, it is because you have faced the storms, the dark clouds and the fears and the anxieties of nighttime. That's what gives you the ability to look at life differently. What also gives you the ability to be content, to learn contentment is to reflect on how God, this God who gives himself away, has been giving himself to you in the past. That's how we learn. Lamentations Chapter 3:2, verses of Scripture that that just amazes me every time I hear it and every time we sing it. Reminds me that every morning God's mercy, God's compassion, are renewed every day. Great is thy faithfulness. That hymn that we sing, it's traced to those verses in Lamentations 3:22-23. Great is thy faithfulness. The reflection of the hymn writer is the same reflection of the Apostle Paul. It is learning to

be content because we are learning that God is always faithful to His promises no matter what. God gives us what we need in the moment.

I have learned to be content, whatever the circumstances. The good, the bad or the ugly. Verse 12, he says, I know What it is to be "in need And I know what it is to have plenty. Those two words "I know" remind us of what he has learned. They remind us of what we have learned as well. Our confidence comes not in a vacuum. Faith is not taking a blind step into the unknown because we just stepped forward regardless of what we know and experience. Faith is not blind, as some have taught us over the decades. For those of us who are followers of Jesus, faith is moving confidently forward because we trust the character of God. Not that we trust our circumstances or even ourselves. It is God's faithfulness that roots us, always.

I have learned, Paul says, the secret of being content in any and every situation. That's the secret, folks. The secret is that we base All of our hope on the giver of hope, on the faithful one. And therefore, we can say with Paul those famous words of Verse 13. I can do all this - this meaning everything that he just said, being content regardless of the good, the bad and the ugly I can be content. Why? Because of Jesus Christ. I can do all this through Him, through Christ Who gives me Strength.

When I read these verses and reflect on them, which I have done numerous times over the years personally and sidle up next to those words in the midst of this ugly season, What I hear is the voice of our Savior telling us - I've got you. I've got you. I've got your mom and dad. I've got your family. I've got your spouse; I've got your siblings. I've got your son or daughter, The ones that you have been praying for, for decades, I've got them in the palm of my hand. And the faithful character of the Lord, in the midst of the good, the bad and the ugly is reminding us in these words to keep our focus On God's faithfulness; to remain motivated, to lean in to Him, even when we don't think we can. And He's reminding us that He always is in control. And that nothing, nothing good, bad or ugly will be outside His Lordship and control.

That's the God that we serve. That's the God of the Apostle Paul. That's the God that we see embodied on the cross of Jesus Christ. That's the God who's in you right now. Equipping you to face whatever good, whatever bad and whatever ugly comes your way.

So, I invite you to trust him. Especially when it's hard. Especially when it's a season that you're facing situations or circumstances that you can't fix or control. And especially when you're keeping your eyes on the day that is yet to come, when God will make all things beautiful in its time.

Let's pray. God, we thank you for the words of the Apostle Paul. And we thank you for the gift of your presence with us. We thank you, Lord, that you are a God who never, ever wastes a hurt. Thank you, Lord for always being faithful, for renewing your mercy

and your compassion every single day. And for reminding us that during the darkest of the night a light has yet to come if we just hold on.

We love you, Lord. And we thank you for loving us first. As we pray in Jesus mighty name, Amen.