

## SELF SUFFICIENT IN CHRIST

- A. Introduction: We live in a broken world that has been severely damaged by sin. There's no such thing as a problem free, trouble free life in this present world. We can't stop trouble from coming into our lives, but God's Word (the Bible) teaches us how to deal with life's hardships in the most effective way possible.
1. Therefore, we are talking about the importance of becoming a regular systematic reader of the Bible, especially the New Testament. Regular systematic reading means reading each book of the New Testament from start to finish in as short a time as possible—and then doing it over and over.
    - a. The purpose of this type of reading is to become familiar with the text, because understanding comes with familiarity. And familiarity comes with regular repeated reading.
    - b. This type of reading will change your perspective or the way you see things, which in turn changes how life's troubles affect you and how you respond to them.
      1. The Bible gives us an eternal perspective. It reveals that there is more to life than this present life, and that the greater and better part of life is ahead after this life. When you learn to see life's troubles in relation to the life after this life, it lightens the load of this life. Rom 8:18
      2. The Bible also gives us information about our present circumstances. There are always more facts available to us than what we can see or feel in the moment. God is with us and for us in every situation to help us, and to get us through whatever we're facing. Ps 46:1
  2. Part of developing a changed perspective is learning to see the big picture—to see and understand why God created human beings and what His ultimate purpose is for this world.
    - a. God created men and women to become His sons and daughters through faith in Jesus Christ. He created the earth to be a home for Himself and His family (Eph 1:4-5; Isa 45:18). When the first man (Adam) sinned, his actions had a catastrophic effect on the family and the family home.
      1. Human nature was altered, men and women became sinners by nature, and this planet was infused with a curse of corruption and death. Gen 2:17; Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; Rom 5:19; etc.
      2. Jesus came to earth two thousand years ago to pay for sin and open the way for sinners to be transformed into sons and daughters of God. When Jesus returns to this world, He will restore this planet to a fit forever home for God and His family. John 1:12-13; Rev 21-22; etc.
    - b. Because of sin, neither humanity nor this world is presently the way God created them to be—He is not the cause of life's hardship and suffering. But He is able to use the harsh realities of life in a fallen world and cause them to serve His ultimate purpose for a family.
      1. The Bible gives us real life examples of real people who got real help from God in really hard circumstances. Their stories show us how God works behind the scenes in this broken world to bring genuine good out of genuine bad as He gathers His family. They also show us how, in the midst of hardship, awareness of life after this life lightened the load for these people.
      2. These accounts give us hope because they show us how God helps His people in hard times. We see that even impossible circumstances have solutions in the hands of God. Rom 15:4
  3. Regular Bible reading is vital to the process of developing a new perspective. It assures us that our troubles don't come from God—they are simply part of life in a sin damaged world. And it helps us see that all pain, sorrow, loss, and injustice is temporary. Everything will ultimately be made right—some in this life and some in the life to come. Rev 21:1-4
    - a. Regular Bible reading is important because it not only informs you of things you can't see (the life to come and God with you and for you right now), it persuades you of their reality to the point where you aren't moved by what you see and feel in the moment because you have hope. Rom 4:19-20
    - b. Regular Bible reading also helps us in the constant battle we all face with the emotions and thoughts that are generated by our present circumstances and rob us of the peace and joy that can sustain us in the hard times (Isa 26:3; Ps 119:65). We continue our discussion tonight.

- B. God's Word imparts peace and joy to us as we keep our attention on it. Therefore, the Bible has much to say about where we place our mind and focus our attention, as well as what thoughts we choose to think on.
1. II Cor 4:17-18—In the context of his many troubles Paul talked about looking at or mentally considering what he couldn't see, stating that these unseen realities lightened the load of his troubles.
    - a. The Bible reveals that there is a dimension or realm beyond the perception of our physical senses—God with you and for you, loving, protecting, providing for, and guiding you. I Tim 1:17; Col 1:16
    - b. Heb 12:1-2—Paul urged believers to live their lives looking unto Jesus, our source of everything. Looking unto means to consider attentively. It literally means to look away from one thing to another. We look at Jesus through the Bible. The Living Word, Jesus, is revealed in and through the written Word of God. John 5:39; John 14:21
      1. We don't deny what we see and feel. We recognize that there are more facts in our situation than what we see and feel in the moment.
      2. We remind ourselves that everything we see is temporary and subject to change by the power of God either in this life or the life to come, and that He will get us through until He gets us out.
  2. Phil 4:6-8—In the context of not being anxious or worrying about anything, Paul urged believers to look to God for help (make their requests known to God) and then to think on certain things.
    - a. Phil 4:8—Keep your thoughts continually fixed on all that is authentic and real, honorable and admirable, beautiful and respectful, pure and holy, merciful and kind. And fasten your thoughts on every glorious word of God, praising him always (TPT).
      1. The Greek word that is translated think, fix, and fasten your thoughts literally means to take an inventory. When you inventory you count up or make a list of something—a volitional act.
      2. This Greek word carries the idea of “making those things the subject of your thoughtful consideration or carefully reflecting on them” (*Vine's Dictionary of New Testament Words*).
        - A. Paul instructs Christians to make a conscious decision to think about certain things—whatever is true, worthy of honor, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, praise worthy. Each of the descriptive terms Paul used in v8 is an attribute of God's Word. Ps 19
        - B. Then, once you call to memory what God says, you draw conclusions about your situation based, not on what you see and feel, but on unseen realities revealed in the Word of God.
    - b. When troubles invade our life, it stirs up emotions and thoughts. Those emotions and thoughts may be perfectly legitimate. But they don't take into account all the unseen facts in your situation—God with you and for you, working to produce eternal results and bring genuine good out of genuine bad, as He get you through until He gets you out. Eph 1:11; Rom 8:28; etc.
      1. You have to exercise your will and choose to bring to mind and focus your attention on what God says in His Book. Take an inventory of the way things really are.
      2. But, if you are not familiar with God's Word (and you aren't if you don't read it), then you don't have much to inventory and focus on.
  3. Let's look at the context in which Paul instructs believers to deal with worry by fixing their thoughts on God's Word. (Worry or anxiety is a form of fear. It's fear of the future, fear of what might happen.)
    - a. Remember, Paul wrote this epistle or letter while he was under house arrest in Rome awaiting a hearing before Caesar on charges related to his faith in Christ. Christians from the Greek city of Philippi sent a financial gift to help cover Paul's expenses. He wrote in part to thank them.
    - b. Phil 4:6-8—Paul exhorted believers to deal with worry by looking to God for help and then fixing their mind on unseen realities. Then he urged them to continue to put into practice what they learned from him both through His words and actions, assuring them that the peace of God would then be with them. Then, he thanked them for their gift (v9-10).
    - c. We discussed the next part of Paul's letter in some detail last week (v11-13). Paul assured his

readers that he was never in need because he had learned to be content no matter the circumstances—with much or little, plenty or lack. The Greek word translated content means self-sufficient, needing no assistance (v11).

1. Phil 4:11-13— For I have learned how to be content (satisfied to the point where I am not disturbed or disquieted) in whatever state I am...I have learned in any and all circumstances, the secret of facing every situation...I have strength for all things in Christ Who empowers me—I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him Who infuses inner strength into me, [that is, I am self-sufficient in Christ’s sufficiency] (Amp).
2. In other words, Paul knew that because God Almighty, the Lord Jesus Christ, was with him and for him, he had what he needed no matter what circumstances he faced. Nothing is too big for God. There is no circumstance for which He has no solution.
- d. Let’s go back to v9. Note that Paul instructed the Philippians (and us) to deal with worry by fixing their mind on unseen realities, and then told them to do what they had seen him do.
  1. Paul established the church in Philippi, and these believers had seen him get arrested, beaten, and jailed for preaching Jesus (Acts 16). Paul was again imprisoned when he wrote this letter.
  2. Notice that he told them to do what they heard and saw him do (v9). We can reasonably presume that this is what Paul himself did when and if he was tempted to worry because of his situation. He exercised his will and chose to think of and focus on unseen realities—God with him and for him, helping him deal with whatever came his way. Therefore he was content.
3. Paul stated that he learned to be independent of circumstances. But, he didn’t start out at this stage of development. He had to grow in his ability to be content or self-sufficient in Christ’s sufficiency.
  - a. When Paul wrote his epistle to the Philippians he had been a believer for thirty years. Earlier in his relationship with the Lord, Paul asked God to make his troubles go away—and God didn’t do it. Paul was asking God to do something that He has not promised to do in this present age. John 16:33
  - b. Paul revealed this II Cor 12:7-10. There’s much misunderstanding about this passage, so we need to explain some things before we make our main point.
    1. Paul asked the Lord to remove what he called a thorn in the flesh. Note, Paul makes it clear that the thorn did not come from God. Paul identified the thorn as the messenger of Satan that was sent to buffet or repeatedly hit him.
      - A. The Greek word for messenger (*aggelos*) means messenger, especially an angel (holy or fallen). The word thorn is used two ways in Scripture. It either means literal thorns (like a crown of thorns) or troublesome beings (angelic or human). Num 33:55; Joshua 23:13
      - B. When we read the Book of Acts we find that everywhere Paul went to preach the gospel, wicked men influenced by an unseen being (a thorn in the flesh) stirred up mobs that attacked him, tried to kill him, and drove him out of town on several occasions. Acts 13-28
      - C. Why did this happen? Paul had thorn in the flesh because that’s life in a sin cursed earth.
    2. God did not send a demonic being to Paul to keep him humble. God and the devil don’t work together. Satan is God’s adversary. The devil is not interested in making one of God’s greatest workers more Christlike by humbling him. The Holy Spirit is our Sanctifier and Teacher, and the instrument He uses on us is the Word of God. John 14:26; Eph 6:17; etc.
      - A. The Greek word that is translated exalted is composed of two words, *hupo* (above) and *airo* (to raise). It is used literally of sails on boats and can be used for raising oneself over.
      - B. The thorn was sent by Satan to slow or stop Paul’s progress through keeping him from being exalted or raised—or believed—by those he preached to. If Paul’s audience didn’t receive the revelations given him by Jesus, then the gospel wouldn’t spread. II Cor 12:1-4
  - c. Paul asked God three times to take the thorn away. God did not do so. The Lord wasn’t refusing to answer Paul’s prayer. Paul was asking the Lord to do what he has not promised to do yet—that

is, remove the devil and fallen angels (demons, devils) from all human contact.

1. However, God gave Paul the answer he needed: My Grace is sufficient for you—my favor and loving-kindness and mercy—are enough for you, [that is, sufficient against any danger and to enable you to bear the trouble manfully] (II Cor 12:9, Amp).
2. The Greek word translated sufficient is a form of the same word Paul used in Phil 4:11 for content. Paul got the message. He realized that through God with him and for him and in him, he had everything he needed to face whatever challenges came his way.
3. He responded: So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may work through me (II Cor 12:9, NLT). Paul was lifted up above in the midst of it all.
- d. Through repeated exposure to the Living Word of God (as Jesus appeared to him and taught him, Gal 1:11-12; Acts 26:16) Paul grew in his understanding and recorded what he learned in his letters.
  1. Paul is the one who wrote, I have come through a process of persuasion to the settled conclusion that nothing can separate me from God who loves me (Rom 8:38-39; Wuest).
  2. Unseen realities became real to Paul and gave him peace of mind in the midst of troubles. The same will happen to us as we read the New Testament regularly and repeatedly.
4. When Jesus was on earth He warned His followers that Satan comes to steal the Word from people through tribulation, affliction, and persecution. Matt 13:21; Mark 4:17
  - a. Satan's primary tactics are mental (Eph 6:11). He presents us with lies about God, ourselves, and our circumstances in an attempt to influence our behavior.
  - b. We are most vulnerable to his strategies in the hard times because, when we are in pain physically or emotionally, what we see and how we feel often confirms the lies he whispers to our minds: You're going down! God doesn't love you! You've been too bad! There's no help for you!
    1. Some mistakenly say that life's trials are God's way of testing us. God doesn't test us with trials. Trials don't come from Him. However, life's troubles do test our faith. (For an in depth discussion of this topic read my book *God Is Good And Good Means Good*).
    2. The test is always the same in every circumstance. Will you continue to believe God's Word despite what you see and feel in the moment?
  - c. We've made a number of references to Joseph in the last few lessons. His story is a spectacular example of how God helped a real person through real difficulties and brought tremendous good to multitudes of people as He furthered His plan for a family. Gen 37-50
    1. At the beginning of Joseph's story Almighty God promised him greatness and told him that his family would one day bow down to him (Gen 37:5-11). It took over twenty years for God's Word to come to pass. And Joseph's life got much worse before it got better.
    2. Note this statement about Joseph's ordeal: Joseph...was sold as a slave. His feet were hurt with fetters; his neck was put in a collar of iron; until what he (God) said came to pass, the word of the Lord tested him (Ps 105:17-19, ESV).
    3. Joseph faced the same test that you and I face. Would he (will we) continue to believe what God says despite how we feel and how things look? Joseph continued to believe God and ultimately was delivered. God got him through until he got him out. Joseph is now with the Lord in Heaven waiting to return to earth to live here again—this time forever.
- C. Conclusion: We could teach entire lessons on many of the points we've made. But my main goal in this series is to encourage and inspire you to become a regular systematic reader of the New Testament.
  1. When you learn to see reality as it truly is through the Word of God and learn to keep your attention (mind) focused on God through His Word, like Paul, you'll be lifted up in the midst of troubles.
  2. Like Paul, you can get to the point where you're persuaded that you have what you need because Almighty God is with you, for you, and in you. You are self sufficient in Christ. More next week!