



Think of your prison, your bondage, your thorns in the flesh,
your unanswered prayers, your feelings of rejection,
your unfulfilled dreams, your never-ending pain.

Think. And ask: Am I content?

EVERY

NEED

MET

By Chris Maxwell

Editor's note: In March 1996, in the midst of a thriving pastoral and writing ministry, Chris Maxwell nearly lost his life to viral encephalitis. He continues to battle the after-effects of the illness, including short-term memory loss and epilepsy with the attendant risk of seizures. His newest book, Changing My Mind, shares Chris' experiences during his illness and the profound changes his recovery has brought to his life, his family and his ministry.

Replace pure health in me, I prayed. I praised God since He saved me. People die from this disease. God kept me alive. On earth. Barely aware of all I want to know, but aware of life. This miracle! Given by God! I thank Him and ask Him for more improvement. To remind myself He does not mind me praying, I read the Word. Gospel? Good News. God's love? Amazing. I praised Him.

My firstborn son also writes, mixing melody and honesty; like what happens with many good poets and songwriters, his nonfiction life displays drama. Taylor gave his testimony to a group of youth. Friends told me what he said, and I asked for a written version of his thoughts. From his heart to mine, I received it.

Read Taylor's honesty:

When I first found out how ill my father had become, mixed anger and fear rushed through my body. I was so young. To have something like

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'Having God back in control and being

that happen to my father was cold and merciless. I began to blame God as my father struggled to return to his normal self. We knew it would take lots of time but it was hard to respect him. It felt as if he didn't know as much as I did. And, for a while, he didn't.

I began to turn to my girlfriend for attention and replaced God as being Lord of my life with her. She had my attention, my focus and all my time; I left God and my family in the dark. This went on for two years of an on-and-off terrible relationship until one day God broke me. I spent that day sobbing on my knees and crying out for repentance.

I had to leave old friends and many selfish things behind and follow Christ again. Yes, it hurt for a while but not as much as sin was hurting me and my future. I once again was able to restore

my relationship with my father and gain respect for my family once again.

Now I feel that, having God back in control and being Lord of my life, I have a freedom like never before. Now Dad and I look back and learn from what went wrong and work together to encourage our family and others. I know he is there to encourage me in my dreams and calling. Thank You, God, and thank you, Dad, for giving me a second chance.

Taylor also typed a personal addition just to me. He wrote, "There you go, man. I hope you don't cry at all." He knew better. He knew I would cry. A few years before I didn't know Taylor would still love his crying father. Now it was like rest for the weary.

Rest for the weary?

The apostle Paul knew about it. Paul, another writer and friend, another leader who knew about weakness and storm and unanswered prayer. He knew about rest for the weary.

Recently, Jim Rovira and I led a Bible study together. I gave the introduction, illustrations, and practice application. I let Jim serve the meat. His mind can do things like that. The truths we studied wouldn't leave my mind though. They stayed.

We were studying a series of the most-often-quoted verses of the Bible. My plan was to clarify the context and grasp the true meaning. So instead of just memorizing and quoting Philipians 4:13, we helped the audience notice the full scene. I didn't expect to notice so much.

Paul related to hurt and disappoint-

Lord of my life, I have a freedom like never before.’ — Taylor Maxwell

ment. But look at his attitude from Philippians 4:10-19:

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 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 everything through him who gives me strength.

Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one

church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. (NIV)

Paul didn't just rejoice. He rejoiced greatly. What was his reason for rejoicing? Had they released him from prison? Had God finally answered his prayer and healed Paul's thorn in the flesh? No. Paul rejoiced because

his Philippian friends renewed their concern for him.

That makes me feel better. I'm tempted to join the rejoicing. When others encourage me and pray for me, a sense of rejoicing hits my inner world. Paul welcomed their care and rejoiced. He knew they cared for him even when they struggled to show it. Given a chance, they showed their concerns.

Notice his next confession. He assured them he wasn't sneaking in a plea for more care and concern. In fact, he broadcasted total honesty about how he had learned to live this hard life of reality.

When Jim and I taught this, we emphasized the often misused verse, Philippians 4:13. I've quoted it in so many ways that just never worked. I

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quoted “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” when I played high school basketball. But I never dunked the ball. Instead of using it as a lucky charm, Paul placed it in his note as a confession of reality. In what context could he do all things? In every way the Higher Power handed the prison dweller the strength to do it.

And look how God handed Paul that strength. God taught Paul to be content in every situation. That is a rare accomplishment. Whatever the circumstances, this leader of the Early Church did not say he escaped prison by God’s power; instead he wrote, “I’ve learned to be content.”

Read the word again: content. Read this one: contentment.

Think of your prison, your bondage, your thorns in the flesh, your unanswered prayers, your feelings of rejection, your poor vision, your unfulfilled dreams, your damaged brain, your chemotherapy, your medical expenses, your never-ending pain. Think. And ask: Am I content?

I think of my thinking. It feels like bondage, like prison. I think of my thinking and ask myself: Am I content? Right here, right now — am I content?

Paul took his thoughts further. He knew about being in need, and he also knew about having plenty. He knew contentment when having leftovers to put in the freezer and also when not having enough fresh milk for his cereal or a modem for his computer.

More importantly, he knew contentment when living in either condition, in plenty or in want. And he emphasized the positive by confessing how he endured such extremes of life: “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”

Then, he went another step, writing: “Yet it was good of you to share

in my troubles.” Even though Paul had endured and survived, even though he learned the life of contentment, even though he often lived distant from those in whom he had invested so much of his life, he felt they had entered his world of trouble. From a distance, they related. In much different settings, they cared. Fulfilling roles unlike Paul’s, they honored him by joining in his pain.

They gave more than others, and their aid marched into his heart. Their care invaded his world. Isn’t that healing? Isn’t that love? Isn’t that remembering those who forget?

The gifts given, Paul said, not only pleased him. They pleased God.

How could he add another sentence after that? I mean, we can almost smell the aroma he describes. We can almost hear his grateful voice and notice his gentle tears. But his next sentence of prayer reminds us of reality: “And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”

“You did all this for me,” Paul said. “Back at you,” Paul said. “But not from me. From God, the Giver of All. From Him, every need you have will be met.”

Do you hear what I hear? Do you hear Paul the prisoner voicing a promise to you?

“Every need. Met. By God, every need met.”

Read those words. Pray those words. Receive and believe those words. ■

From Changing My Mind by Chris Maxwell (Franklin Springs, Ga.: LifeSprings, 2005). Reprinted with permission.

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E-mail your comments to pe@ag.org.

ABCs OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

A. Admit you are a sinner.

“There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Romans 3:10,23

(See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

Ask God’s forgiveness.

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Romans 10:13

B. Believe in Jesus (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

Become a child of God by receiving Christ.

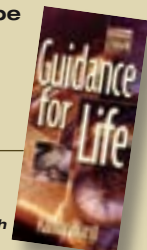
“To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.

“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

For further help, contact the Assemblies of God church near you.

If you would like someone to pray with you concerning your decision to follow Jesus Christ, please contact the church indicated on the back cover or call:



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