

1 This morning for our message, just a  
2 heads up, instead of having some kind of  
3 a sermon outline on the back of the  
4 bulletin, I needed more space. So we have  
5 a bulletin insert that  
6 has the scripture on one side that we're  
7 gonna read together today, and then  
8 some stuff about the message on the back  
9 page, which includes a little thing to  
10 fill in if you're a rule follower.  
11 or just keen to do so, and you want to  
12 fill in the blanks, the alphabetical  
13 blanks that you see there, that'll be  
14 part of the message today. Grab a pen.  
15 If you don't have a pen, ask your  
16 neighbor, and if your neighbor doesn't  
17 have an extra one, you can ask  
18 Cindy. I saw Cindy here a moment ago. She  
19 may have actually headed to the office to  
20 do some livestream stuff, but find  
21 somebody that has a writing utensil if  
22 you want to use one. If you don't, raise  
23 your hand and I'll stop the sermon and go  
24 find you a pencil. Umm  
25 Philippians chapter four, verses 10  
26 through 23, the end of Paul's letter  
27 to the Philippians that we have been  
28 studying together over the last several  
29 weeks. Hear the word of God.  
30 I rejoice in the Lord greatly,  
31 that now at length you have revived your  
32 concern for me. You were indeed concerned  
33 for me, but you had no opportunity.  
34 Not that I am speaking of being in need,  
35 for I have learned in whatever situation  
36 I am, to be content.  
37 I know how to be brought low, and I know  
38 how to abound. In any and every  
39 circumstance, I have learned the secret  
40 of facing plenty and hunger,  
41 abundance and needs. I can do all  
42 things through him who strengthens me.  
43 Yet it was kind of you to share my  
44 trouble. And you Philippians yourselves  
45 know that in the beginning of the gospel,  
46 when I left Macedonia,  
47 Yeah, you know what? Something got cut off  
48 here. I left Macedonia. I guess I have to  
49 read up there. No church entered into  
50 partnership with me in giving and  
51 receiving, except you only.  
52 All right, I guess I have to use a  
53 screen. Note to self, check  
54 your text. Your text is missing some  
55 stuff that I printed in the bulletin for  
56 you, just so you know. Check with the  
57 real word of God. Okay, even in  
58 Thessalonica, you you sent me help  
59 for my needs once and again. Not that I  
60 seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that  
61 increases to your credit. I receive  
62 full payment and more. I am well  
63 supplied, having received from  
64 Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a  
65 fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable  
66 and pleasing to God. And my God  
67 will supply every need of yours according  
68 to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.  
69 To our God and Father be glory forever

70 and ever. Amen. Greet every  
71 saint in Christ Jesus. The  
72 brothers who are with me greet you. All  
73 the saints greet you, especially those of  
74 Caesar's household. The grace of our Lord  
75 Jesus Christ be with your spirit.  
76 Let's pray. Lord God, we are grateful  
77 for your word. Grateful for the  
78 direction that you give as you guide us  
79 in our lives, as you guide us toward  
80 fulfillment, as you guide us toward  
81 holiness and goodness and righteousness.  
82 Lord, as you guide us out of trouble  
83 and into you. Lord, we  
84 ask for that guidance here today as we  
85 consider your word together and we pray  
86 in Jesus' name, amen. There are  
87 two big surprises in this ending  
88 section of the letter to the Philippians.  
89 The first is that the Apostle Paul has  
90 such a difficult time coming out and  
91 simply saying thank you to the  
92 Philippians for the gifts Epaphroditus  
93 has delivered to them. If I had used  
94 so much care and caution and  
95 qualification in thanking my grandma for  
96 my Christmas sweater, She would  
97 probably have concluded that I wasn't  
98 really very thankful at all, and  
99 stopped knitting the matching hat  
100 altogether.  
101 At length, you have revived your concern  
102 for me, Paul says. And then he adds,  
103 It was kind of you to share my trouble. I  
104 am well supplied, having received the  
105 gifts you sent. A fragrant offering, a  
106 sacrifice acceptable to God. He never  
107 really even says, Thank you.  
108 Some have called Paul's efforts here a  
109 thankless thanks.  
110 Why is Paul so careful? What is the  
111 problem? Well, Paul believed in and  
112 wrote in support of an apostle's right to  
113 be supported financially by others,  
114 but normally, he insisted on supporting  
115 his own ministry by his own labor.  
116 He did this to make sure no one would  
117 think the gospel of God's free grace  
118 was for sale. to disarm possible  
119 accusations that he was  
120 using his mission as a pretext for  
121 greed. And so, to set an  
122 example for others that was beyond  
123 reproach. Paul wants the  
124 Philippians to know he is grateful for  
125 their gift, but he also needs  
126 them to know that he is not preaching for  
127 greedy gain. He must say thank  
128 you. while continuing to insist on his  
129 essential independence from  
130 material acquisition. He must  
131 proclaim a self-sufficiency based on  
132 something else. That is his  
133 problem. The second surprise  
134 is even more astounding than the  
135 first. God give us ears to hear.  
136 It is something Paul says, I  
137 have learned the secret. The  
138 secret of facing plenty and hunger,

139 abundance and need. The  
140 NIV translation spells it out for  
141 us a little more directly. I have learned  
142 the secret of being content.  
143 That is shocking.  
144 I know a lot of people. I read  
145 about them. I worship with some of them  
146 on Sundays. I see many of them on  
147 TV. I listen to them on the  
148 radio. I look at one of them brushing  
149 what's left of his hair in my bathroom  
150 mirror. I hear about their  
151 wars, and their court cases, and their  
152 business successes, and their political  
153 aspirations, and their political  
154 frustrations, and their concern about  
155 all the things that still need to be done  
156 around here. There are a lot of words you  
157 could use to describe these people,  
158 but content is not one that  
159 leaps to mind. Maybe if things always  
160 went just right, somebody could be  
161 content. But do we know anybody like  
162 that? If someone said they were  
163 truly content, I would  
164 suspect they were lying,  
165 maybe mostly to themselves.  
166 Or else they knew some glorious secret,  
167 missed or forgotten by the rest of us.  
168 Paul the Apostle tells his Philippian  
169 friends he has learned such a  
170 secret. A secret not only of being  
171 content, but of being content  
172 in any and every  
173 circumstance. That  
174 is amazing. It seems too good  
175 to be true. But he says it is,  
176 and his life demonstrates that he has  
177 been initiated into some kind of special,  
178 different, healthy way of life.  
179 Would you like to know the secret?  
180 I can do all  
181 things through him who  
182 strengthens me. You will be  
183 empowered to do everything you are ever  
184 called upon to do through your  
185 connection with Jesus Christ.  
186 That's the secret. Real contentment  
187 only depends on Jesus Christ.  
188 But if it is that simple, why aren't more  
189 people content? And why aren't we  
190 Christians all content?  
191 This is where both of Paul's end of  
192 Philippians surprises work together to  
193 help us. Between the I rejoice  
194 in the Lord greatly, of verse 10, and the  
195 my God will supply every need of yours  
196 according to his riches in glory in  
197 Christ Jesus, of verse 19.  
198 Paul dodges back and forth  
199 between a cautious thank you for the  
200 gifts and a firm I  
201 didn't need them. And I tried to bring  
202 this out in the arrangement that you  
203 find, with certain words missing, by the  
204 way, in your bulletin insert. One on the  
205 left, one on the right, some of it in the  
206 middle. He's dodging back and forth,  
207 and I think I am beginning to see why.

208 What we are witnessing as we read this  
209 passage of Scripture, the closing section  
210 of Paul's letter to his beloved friends  
211 at the church in Philippi, is a  
212 dance. A dance in words and  
213 phrases and important ideas.  
214 It is a beautiful dance, swaying  
215 back and forth. It is a  
216 terrible dance, swaying  
217 back and forth. It is a frightening  
218 dance, for it is a dance of real life  
219 struggle, life and death  
220 struggle. It is the dance of living  
221 and dying. It is what I am calling  
222 the dance of the spider  
223 and the fly. We know about  
224 spiders and flies. Spiders  
225 spin webs, catch bugs, and  
226 digest their food externally by  
227 injecting living prey with juices that  
228 turn its insides to liquid, which can  
229 then be extracted. Flies  
230 buzz around webs, get stuck,  
231 find themselves the focus of attention  
232 for eight nimble legs, and end  
233 up as a dead and hollow shell of their  
234 former selves. We also  
235 know about gratitude and  
236 greed. Or do  
237 we? I think they are as  
238 incompatible as spiders  
239 and flies. One  
240 is going to immobilize the other,  
241 suck the life out of it, and  
242 leave only a hollow shell.  
243 Will you walk into my parlor?  
244 said the spider to the fly.  
245 'Tis the prettiest little parlor that  
246 ever you did spy. The  
247 question I have to ask myself,  
248 and I suggest you ask yourself,  
249 is, which one is the  
250 real spider, and which one  
251 is the real fly in my  
252 life? If I am living my life out  
253 of an inner faith in God, a solid  
254 sense of contentment, and so a  
255 genuine thankfulness,  
256 That gratitude is the name of my good  
257 spider, and it is killing  
258 the pesky fly called  
259 greed stuck in the web of  
260 my life. Or maybe  
261 it is the other way around. One a  
262 spider, one a fly. Call  
263 them gratitude and greed. On the web  
264 of life I'm weaving, one is food  
265 for the one I feed. I'm  
266 living to say thank you, or to say,  
267 I want, I need.  
268 I am dying to have more, or  
269 else content to know I'm freed.  
270 It is gratitude and greed. One a  
271 spider, one a fly.  
272 By the choices I make daily, one  
273 will watch the other die.  
274 Which my spider? Which my fly?  
275 Watch my life. It cannot  
276 lie as I do the

277 deadly dancing of the  
278 spider and the fly.  
279 Maybe one of the reasons that Paul is so  
280 careful in expressing his gratitude is  
281 that he knows how easily it can be turned  
282 into nothing more than an instrument of  
283 greed. If the reason we  
284 say thank you is primarily to  
285 increase our chances of getting  
286 more later, Gratitude  
287 has had the life sucked out of it, like a  
288 hollow fly on a jiggling web.  
289 And greed is the name of the well-fed  
290 spider hiding in the corner.  
291 Paul sets a good example for us by  
292 guarding himself against this lurking  
293 possibility. Do we have an  
294 usher? Would you mind  
295 helping? Thank you.  
296 Not that I seek the gift, Paul says.  
297 But I seek the fruit that increases to  
298 your credit. Paul seems to have a healthy  
299 respect for the sinister power of greed.  
300 He seems to understand that greed always  
301 demands impossible circumstances,  
302 only delights in what it doesn't yet  
303 possess, and relentlessly  
304 disposes of authentic gratitude.  
305 He wants his spider to be called  
306 gratitude and to catch and dine on the  
307 fly called greed. He will  
308 not live out of greed, but in gratitude.  
309 He knows the secret of contentment. He  
310 can endure and overcome in any and all  
311 circumstances because of his relationship  
312 with Jesus Christ. Real  
313 contentment in life only depends on  
314 Jesus, always delights in  
315 authentic gratitude, and  
316 relentlessly disposes of  
317 self-centered greed.  
318 Why aren't more of us content?  
319 Maybe because we don't really know the  
320 secret, or we don't really believe it.  
321 Or else maybe because we want other  
322 things more than contentment.  
323 More things, more thrills,  
324 more money, more pleasure.  
325 Which web are we living on?  
326 If we are not very content, if we want  
327 and need more and more, maybe it is  
328 because our spider is called greed,  
329 And our fly is gratitude.  
330 He dragged her up his winding stair  
331 into his dismal den,  
332 within his little parlor. But  
333 she ne'er came out again.  
334 How do we know if our greed is killing  
335 our gratitude, or vice versa? And  
336 what can we do about it? Based on  
337 Paul's example and his closing words from  
338 his Philippian letter, I've come up with  
339 eight characteristics of a  
340 gratitude-based life of contented  
341 connection to Christ. They are the eight  
342 legs of the spider called gratitude.  
343 Are they descriptive of your life and  
344 mine? And then I have eight casting  
345 characteristics, which name the eight

346 legs of the spider called greed. Listen.  
347 And you can follow along in your bulletin  
348 insert if you would like, and fill in the  
349 blanks if you would like to do that as  
350 well. Characteristic number one.  
351 The A leg is called  
352 authenticity. Gratitude  
353 is truthful. It deals with what  
354 is. Paul is in jail, and it has been  
355 some time between gifts from the  
356 Philippians. and not much from  
357 anywhere else, apparently. He  
358 knows all this, and still he expresses a  
359 thankfulness which is sincere and mixed  
360 with genuine concern for others.  
361 Greed's first leg, conversely,  
362 is called actor. It will  
363 say and do whatever it takes, true or  
364 not, to get what it wants.  
365 It is always focusing on what is not,  
366 what it does not yet have from its narrow  
367 me-first perspective. Gratitude's  
368 second leg is bravery.  
369 In the midst of people snoring in church,  
370 it continues on. Sorry.  
371 It is willing to take risks for the  
372 sake of others. Look at Paul.  
373 He has given up his social status and his  
374 security. His life is on the  
375 line. Why? So that  
376 he can serve Jesus Christ and help  
377 others, particularly formerly  
378 excluded Gentiles, hear  
379 his good news of God's saving  
380 love in action. Greed,  
381 however, is a bully coward.  
382 Those two, I think, really do go  
383 together. It takes the easiest way to get  
384 the most for itself with little or no  
385 regard for other people, other  
386 people that it uses. Then, as we have  
387 seen, gratitude walks especially on the  
388 leg of contentment. What  
389 it has is always enough. Greed,  
390 though, has come cleaner. What it  
391 has is always too little. One  
392 of the best things I ever found in a  
393 sandwich shop did not come  
394 between two slices of bread.  
395 It was on the wall, a  
396 sign that read, The gap  
397 between more and enough  
398 never closes. For  
399 that number four D is for delightfully  
400 dependent. I can do all  
401 things through him who strengthens me.  
402 The authentic, brave, and contented life  
403 of gratitude is not based on an  
404 absolute stoic  
405 self-sufficiency. It  
406 delights to be dependent on Jesus Christ  
407 alone. Greed, though,  
408 keeps asking, bullying, and complaining  
409 its way toward becoming a deceitful  
410 destroyer. Because it is  
411 dependent on Christ, the gratitude spider  
412 finds it is walking on a fifth leg called  
413 empowered, empowered by Christ.  
414 I can do everything I need to

415 do. Christ will enable me.  
416 Meanwhile, the greed spider is an  
417 enslaver. It deals in  
418 addictions of all kinds.  
419 Drink, drugs, clothes,  
420 cars, food, movies, money,  
421 books, muscles, thrills.  
422 There is always something else it must  
423 have. F is for filled with faith.  
424 Gratitude knowingly walks on a strong leg  
425 of faith. It lives with joy out of what  
426 it believes, freely to achieve  
427 what it hopes. When Paul was  
428 taken to prison, he kept believing that  
429 God was with him and still working.  
430 Now, as he writes to the Philippians,  
431 he can see that his imprisonment has  
432 brought the good news of Jesus to  
433 Caesar's household. It was a  
434 brilliant stroke of God's  
435 master plan. On the other hand,  
436 faith is a luxury which greed  
437 cannot afford. It cannot see much  
438 return on the investment. So it is  
439 instead a frightened  
440 fear-monger. Fear is a  
441 powerful, motivating force, and  
442 greed knows how it works. It  
443 lives in anxiety bound to manipulate  
444 others to avoid what it fears.  
445 The seventh leg bears the spider's motto.  
446 For gratitude, it is Give  
447 for the giving God. For greed,  
448 it is Get for yourself.  
449 And so finally, the last leg marks  
450 gratitude as an attitude which is  
451 heaven-sent, and the bearer as one  
452 who is humbly his.  
453 And greed's last leg, hell-bound.  
454 So with which spider do you and I  
455 identify most closely? And if we  
456 are living on the wrong web, how can we  
457 change things? How can we find real  
458 contentment and cultivate authentic  
459 gratitude? Seek to know  
460 the living Lord, Jesus Christ, more  
461 deeply. Talk to him in prayer.  
462 Read his word, the Bible. Spend  
463 time with others who trust in him.  
464 Keep coming to church.  
465 Make worship and learning and fellowship  
466 in the Lord's house on Sundays an  
467 essential priority, rather than  
468 an occasional benefit. And  
469 ask him, Ask Jesus to help  
470 you with contentment. Ask him to name  
471 your spider gratitude and your  
472 fly greed, and to  
473 let them do their thing. He will  
474 empower you. Perhaps slowly,  
475 but surely, Jesus Christ  
476 will change us like he changed the  
477 apostle Paul.  
478 Then what people will be witnessing as  
479 they look at our lives will be a dance.  
480 a dance in words and actions and  
481 important attitudes. It will be a  
482 beautiful dance, and a terrible  
483 dance. It will be a frightening

484 dance, for it will be a dance of  
485 real-life struggle, life and death  
486 struggle. It will be the dance of  
487 living and dying, the dance  
488 of the spider and the fly.  
489 And then, through Him who gives us  
490 strength, Within each of us will be  
491 a very empty and dead fly  
492 called greed, and a very full  
493 and contented spider called  
494 gratitude. Real  
495 contentment in life only depends on  
496 Jesus Christ, always delights  
497 in authentic gratitude, and  
498 relentlessly disposes of self-centered  
499 greed. The terrible and  
500 wonderful final paradox is that living  
501 out of greed, we end up empty.  
502 But living in simple contentment with  
503 Christ, we are filled to overflowing  
504 for all eternity.  
505 And my God will supply every need of  
506 yours according to his riches  
507 in glory in Christ  
508 Jesus. Years ago,  
509 At a previous church, I was part of a  
510 Monday memorial service for a  
511 27-year-old woman who left  
512 behind a three-and-a-half-year-old  
513 daughter. Our large church  
514 sanctuary was filled with people  
515 lost in sadness and shock.  
516 Does our message of gratitude and  
517 contentment in Christ ring  
518 true at a time like that?  
519 Apparently not. for one young man who  
520 sat in the back. I did my best  
521 to offer the good news of Jesus Christ,  
522 who rose from the grave and brings us  
523 hope and comfort, which transcends  
524 death. But that young man  
525 rose from his seat and left  
526 before the service concluded, after being  
527 overheard by one of our deacons saying to  
528 a friend, Let's get out of here, I  
529 can't stand this, let's go get a drink.  
530 When I heard that story, it broke my  
531 heart. Yes, sadness  
532 and pain are so real. Yes,  
533 gathering church because a friend has  
534 been tragically lost is hard.  
535 But where else are you going to go?  
536 Don't leave too early. Where else  
537 will you find real comfort?  
538 Come back to church. Where  
539 else will you find the truth? Come back  
540 to Christ. Where else will you  
541 find contentment? In the  
542 bar? Even in the face of  
543 tragedy, and maybe especially there,  
544 we must find a way to be grateful and  
545 not greedy. Also on that  
546 Monday so long ago, two hours  
547 before the memorial service because of an  
548 unexpected death, we had our  
549 usual weekly prayer and praise meeting in  
550 our sanctuary. And during that noon  
551 hour, someone unexpected came into our  
552 church. It was a little boy, about



553 eight years old, boldly stepping down the  
554 aisle, followed by his mother and  
555 grandmother, who appeared to be much  
556 less comfortable. The boy guided himself  
557 with a cane because he was blind.  
558 The three had been downtown when  
559 something had caught the boy's attention.  
560 It was our church bell ringing.  
561 A welcome to our time of prayer and  
562 praise. Let's go where the bell is,  
563 he had said. So they had found their way  
564 to our sanctuary, and now one of our  
565 women of prayer was showing the little  
566 boy around. He held the rope that  
567 swung the bell up in our tower. He  
568 felt the steps down front and the  
569 communion table. She described him the  
570 tapestry and the stained glass pictures  
571 of Jesus, and the boy was enthralled.  
572 He was focused, taking it all in.  
573 At the moment, his disability was no  
574 hindrance to his capacity to be filled  
575 with gratitude, contentment and  
576 wonder. In his blindness, he  
577 was seeing so much more than the young  
578 man who would leave early and angry from  
579 a memorial service two hours later.  
580 And that little boy gives a lovely  
581 picture to us, who live in  
582 various stages of blindness,  
583 and among people who have trouble seeing  
584 what is real and true and lasting and  
585 good, and so have such a difficult time  
586 finding contentment. May  
587 our uncommon gratitude and growing faith  
588 and surprising contentment ring out  
589 loud out where we live and  
590 work and play. And may people then  
591 say, 'Let's go where the bell  
592 is.' And so may they come  
593 and hear the secret. May we describe to  
594 them the open secret of true contentment.  
595 May they, along with us, feel  
596 their way to the shared  
597 secret of Jesus Christ.  
598 I can do all things through  
599 him who strengthens me.  
600 Real contentment in life only depends on  
601 Jesus Christ, always delights  
602 in authentic gratitude, and  
603 relentlessly disposes of  
604 self-centered greed. To our  
605 God and Father be glory  
606 forever and ever.  
607 Amen. Time for us to pray for one  
608 another. I encourage you to  
609 make use of your prayers and praises  
610 page and your covenant connection and  
611 your own prayers during the week. Please  
612 join me as we pray together today.  
613 Heavenly Father, we thank you once again  
614 for this day, for this chance to be  
615 together here in your house. to hear your  
616 word, to be encouraged by your truth,  
617 to worship you as well as we can  
618 in giving our praise to you, each of us  
619 and all of us together. Lord, we  
620 620  
621 00:27:56,360 --> 00:27:58,1000

622 pray for those who have asked us to pray  
623 621  
624 00:27:58,1000 --> 00:28:01,960  
625 for them, our elders, as  
626 they are beginning the process of looking  
627 for our new pastor. Lord, help us to  
628 be excited and enthusiastic about the new  
629 adventure that you are bringing to us and  
630 givesupernatural wisdom  
631 and dedication to our elders and to  
632 those who end up serving on a search  
633 team for us. Guide that whole  
634 process to your glory and our  
635 blessing and benefit. Lord, we pray for  
636 those who are experiencing difficulties  
637 of various kinds, for Alana,  
638 for Robin, for Lisa, for  
639 Cindy in our office who is  
640 losta good friend and her  
641 roommate of so many years, Shirley. Pray  
642 for Shirley's family and her loss.  
643 Pray for Cindy as she now needs to find  
644 another place to live. Lord, we pray  
645 for Leila and her family and for Jeff,  
646 for Jan, for Kellyanne  
647 and Emily and Mallory and  
648 Lori and Paul and others who have  
649 suffered because of the flooding in  
650 Texas. Lord, we pray for  
651 families who have lost loved ones,for the  
652 Lagro family, the Lynch family, the  
653 Rivera family, the family of Kellen, and  
654 the family of Caroline. Lord, we pray  
655 again for our neighbors next door for  
656 your blessing, that you would show  
657 yourself there through us,  
658 however we can be of service to you and  
659 to them. Lord, we pray for those serving  
660 in the military, thankful for their  
661 service, for Noah and Taryn, Cody,  
662 Matthew, Weston, Chase, Levi,  
663 Gary, Molly, Brian. Anna,  
664 Margaret, Benjamin, and Chandler.  
665 Lord, now we pray together the special  
666 prayer that you taught us, saying, our  
667 Father, who art in heaven,  
668 hallowed be thy name, thy  
669 kingdom come, thy will be  
670 done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
671 Give us this day our daily bread,  
672 and forgive us our sins, as we  
673 free of those who sin against us.  
674 and his lives  
675 to the patience of the devil, for God is  
676 his kingdom, and power,  
677 and glory forever. Amen.  
678 Let's stand and sing our closing hymn.  
679 It's number 98, Now Thank We All Our God.  
680 #98.