

Philippians 4:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound:
every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full
and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

Analysis

I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need (οἶδα καὶ ταπεινοῦσθαι, οἶδα καὶ περισσεύειν· ἐν παντὶ καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν μεμύημαι καὶ χορτάζεσθαι καὶ πεινᾶν, καὶ περισσεύειν καὶ ὑστερεῖσθαι, oida kai tapeinousthai, oida kai perisseuein; en panti kai en pasin memyēmai kai chortazesthai kai peinan, kai perisseuein kai hystereisthai)—Double oida ("I know") claims experiential knowledge of both extremes: tapeinousthai ("to be humbled, abased") and perisseuein ("to abound, have plenty"). Memyēmai ("I have been initiated, instructed")—mystery-religion term for secret knowledge. Paul uses it for practical wisdom learned through varied circumstances. Four pairs: full/hungry, abound/need—Paul experienced them all and learned contentment in each. This verse validates v. 11: contentment isn't untested theory but proven through extremes.

Historical Context

Paul's ministry involved dramatic swings: beatings and banquets, prisons and palace hearings, shipwrecks and success. Second Corinthians 11:23-29 catalogs his sufferings; Philippians shows he also knew abundance (supportive churches, fruitful ministry). The 'initiation' (memyēmai) language borrows from mystery religions (Eleusinian, Dionysian) where initiates learned secrets. Paul's 'secret' is

Christ's sufficiency (v. 13). His credibility rests on lived experience, not abstract theology.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. In which extreme—abasement or abundance—do you struggle more with contentment, and why?
2. How has God 'instructed' (memyēmai) you through varied circumstances?
3. What 'secret' of contentment have you learned (or need to learn) through hardship or plenty?

Interlinear Text

οἶδα	καὶ	ταπεινοῦσθαι	οἶδα	καὶ	περισσεύειν	ἐν
I know	and	both how to be abased	I know	and	how to abound	every where
G1492	G2532	G5013	G1492	G2532	G4052	G1722
πᾶσιν	καὶ	ἐν	πᾶσιν	μεμύημαι	καὶ	χορτάζεσθαι
all things	and	every where	all things	I am instructed	and	to be full
G3956	G2532	G1722	G3956	G3453	G2532	G5526
καὶ	πεινᾶν	καὶ	περισσεύειν	καὶ	ὕστερεῖσθαι·	
and	to be hungry	and	how to abound	and	to suffer need	
G2532	G3983	G2532	G4052	G2532	G5302	

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 11:29 (Parallel theme): Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

2 Corinthians 11:27 (Parallel theme): In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

2 Corinthians 11:9 (Parallel theme): And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself.

Deuteronomy 32:10 (Parallel theme): He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.

Isaiah 8:11 (Parallel theme): For the LORD spake thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying,

2 Corinthians 10:1 (Parallel theme): Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you:

Jeremiah 31:19 (Parallel theme): Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.

Nehemiah 9:20 (Parallel theme): Thou gavest also thy good spirit to instruct them, and withheldest not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst.

2 Corinthians 11:7 (Parallel theme): Have I committed an offence in abasing myself that ye might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely?

2 Corinthians 10:10 (Parallel theme): For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.