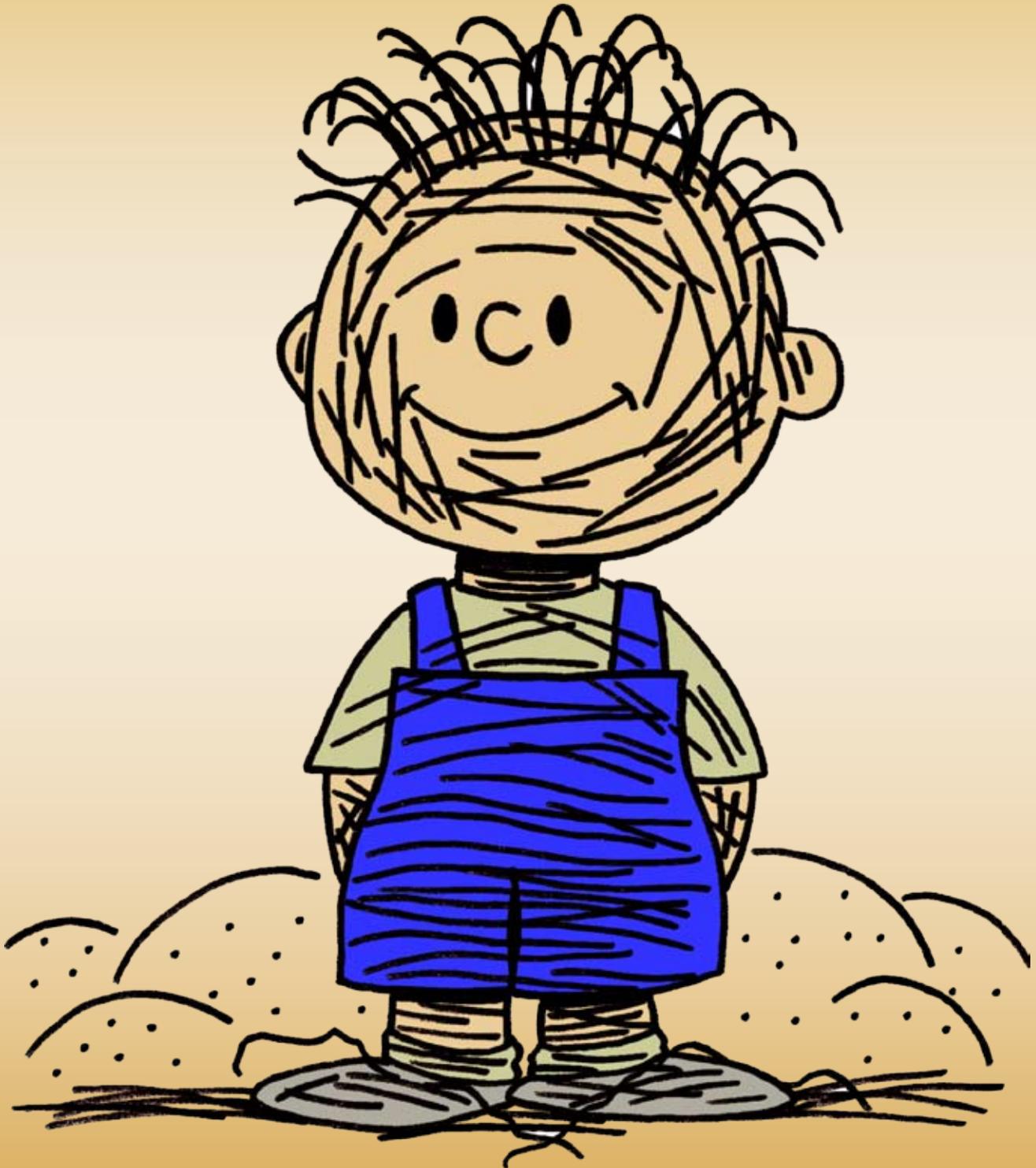


The Pig Pen Principle



by Janet McCarthy

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Pig Pen is a character from the Peanuts by Charles M. Schultz. This poor kid walked through life surrounded by a huge cloud of dust that never seemed to dissipate. I often wondered why his dust cloud never seemed to make navigating through life impossible for him.

Sometimes, when I'm in the midst of difficult circumstances I feel like Pig Pen surrounded by a huge cloud of dust. Dust clouds can be many things; an overwhelming mountain of bills, a difficult work situation, or perhaps even negative thought patterns. Just like Pig Pen, in the midst of a dust cloud, it envelopes me and follows me around. Do you ever feel like that?

Life in the Cloud

During a particularly dust clouded time in my life, I ran across Philippians 4:11-12 in my daily reading.

“...for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.”

I knew I lacked contentment but figured when my dust cloud was gone I would experience it. In the meantime, I would just have to grit my teeth as I bumped around in my cloud. But is that what Paul is saying?

At first glance it looks as though Paul is listing his life events (humble means, prosperity, going hungry, having abundance, and suffering need) like he's going down a check list. In other words as if he was saying for about five years, I suffered need and that was a big dust cloud. But now it's gone and now on to the next dust cloud: going hungry. And so on until they all passed and he finally could be content. But that's not it at all.

A Matter of Focus

Think back to Pig Pen. His dust cloud never left him. He was always walking around in his dust cloud and so was Paul and so are we. There will always be a list of demands and distractions in our lives. Very seldom do we experience sadness for instance and then say, “Whew! Glad that's over and I never have to be sad again!” Paul said that he learned to be content whatever the circumstances. Meaning no matter which cloud was surrounding him at any given moment, he learned to be content in the midst of it. How?

Pig Pen navigated successfully through life because he had to train himself to focus beyond his dust cloud. Contentment is about learning to focus outside of the dust cloud, but our focus can't just be on anything that happens to catch our eye. Paul finished his thought in these verses with declaring in verse 13 that his contentment was possible because of the one who gave him strength. We need to focus Christ who is the source of our strength. Jesus Christ who is our peace (Eph 2:14), our mediator (1 Tim 1:5), the head over all rule and authority (Col 2:10), the Savior of the world (1 Jn 4:14), and the list goes on.

Pig Peg Principle

Hebrews tells us to fix our eyes on Jesus who is the author and finisher (KJV) of our faith. Focus on Jesus Christ who is the source of our contentment, strength and endurance no matter what is swirling around us. Is your forecast cloudy with a chance of dust? Where will your focus be?

