

Today's Message

*Cultivating
Contentment*

Simplicity • Generosity • Joy

A MESSAGE TO THE CONGREGATION

OCTOBER 25, 2009

Cultivating Contentment

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Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid." (Hebrews 13:5-6)

And [Jesus] said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." (Luke 12:15)

My belief statement:

I believe, and you can agree or disagree with me on this, that we have greater spiritual power in life when we are not owned by our possessions. I believe we all have the ability to move away from the sense of not having control over our resources, and we can be spiritually filled when we place our trust in God rather than in our money. The extent of which we are free is dependent on the extent on which we control our money. This sermon is designed to give you control and spiritual power.

Introduction



In recent years we have witnessed a number of devastating natural disasters, including hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, and wildfires. Do you remember Katrina, and the disasters around New Orleans? Or perhaps you recall the recent fires in California? Or the Tsunami of Samoa just a month ago? Natural disasters remind us that everything in this world is temporary. This is why we can say with Jesus, "... life does not consist in the abundance of possessions" (Luke 12:15). Yet the culture is shouting that it's not true. Society tells us our value rests in the amount and cost of our possessions. The result is a wrestling in our

hearts. Despite the fact that we say we believe Jesus' words, we still find ourselves devoting a great deal of our time, talents, energy and resources to the acquisition of more stuff. We *say* that our lives do not consist in the abundance of our possessions, but we *live* as if they do.

Struggling With Discontent

Perhaps you've heard of restless legs syndrome (RLS), a condition in which one has twitches and contractions in the legs. When we attend meetings, there's often someone who is constantly tapping the floor as their leg keeps time to some frantic music in their heads. Restless Heart Syndrome (RHS) works in a similar way, but in the heart. It comes from our depths and its primary symptom is discontent. We find that we are never satisfied with anything. The moment we acquire something, we scarcely take time to enjoy it before we want something else. We are perennially discontent.

We may have developed this syndrome from Christmas and birthday parties. I recall watching little ones tear open carefully prepared wrapped boxes see what was inside. Then they would move on to the next box and the next and the next. Finally, turning to some adult with the words, "Is that all?" Or maybe they would tear open the boxes and be quite content just playing with the wrapping paper and boxes, not even concerned about the gift within.

There is a certain discontent we seem to be hard wired to have. God actually wired our hearts so that they would be discontent with certain things, causing us to seek the only One who can fully satisfy us. We are meant to yearn to know God more, to cultivate a deeper prayer life, to pursue justice and holiness with increasing fervor, to love others more, and to grow in grace and character and wisdom with each passing day. We are designed to be concerned for our neighbors and friends and those across the globe. So when we hear of natural disasters far and wide, we want to help. And we do. We send money or collect winter coats, or whatever it is we need to do, and we do it.

The problem is that those things we should be content with are the very things we find ourselves hopelessly discontented with. For example, we find ourselves discontented with our stuff, our jobs, our churches, our children, and our spouses. Do you think God is not aware of how this goes? I recall some years ago when I had actually spent some time finding the right Christmas gift for a relative. Upon wrapping it, I was advised to include a gift receipt. "Why?" I asked. "Because they might want something better," was the response. Just like that, it's as if we're saying to God, "I don't like what you have given me, God; and I want to trade it in and get something better than what you gave me."

Four Keys to Cultivating Contentment

The Apostle Paul is an excellent example of contentment. In his letter to the Philippians, he wrote of the "secret" to his contentment (Philippians 4:11-12). Like Paul, we can learn to be content in whatever circumstances we may find ourselves. Four keys, which include the "secret" Paul referred to in his letter, can help us to do that.

Four Words to Repeat: "It Could Be Worse"

John Ortberg, pastor at Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in California, says there are four words we should say whenever we find ourselves discontented with something or someone: "It could be worse." This is essentially the practice of looking on



ENOUGH
Discovering Joy Through
Simplicity and Generosity

Four Keys to Cultivating Contentment

- "It could be worse"
- "For how long will this make me happy?"
- Developing a Grateful Heart
- Where Does your Soul Find True Satisfaction?

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the bright side or finding the silver lining. It is recognizing that no matter what we may not like about a thing or person or circumstance, we can always find something good to focus on if only we will choose to do so. So we can practice this today. For example, Nebraska's loss to Iowa State could be viewed by saying, "it could have been worse." There could have been even more fumbles and interceptions! I know it's hard to imagine, but it's true!

One Question to Ask: "For How Long Will This Make Me Happy?"

So often we buy something, thinking it will make us happy, only to find that the happiness lasts about as long as it takes to open the box. There is a moment of satisfaction when we make the purchase, but the item does not continue to bring satisfaction over a period of time. Many of the things we buy are simply not worth the expense. This is why it is a good idea to try before you buy. Last week I mentioned induction cooktops as an example that might give me a thrill for a little while, but might not have real or lasting importance. (Though I still experience what has been dubbed, "cooktop envy.")

Developing a Grateful Heart

Gratitude is essential if we are to be content. The Apostle Paul said that we are to "give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). A grateful heart recognizes that all of life is a gift. Contentment comes when we spend more time giving thanks for what we have than thinking about what's missing or wrong in our lives. Paul was aware of this need for his entire apostleship. Recall that Paul did not spend his time writing from the confines of a hot tub or an air-conditioned library. Instead, he wrote from prisons, and he wrote from the sides of the road when he was on the run from those who intended to silence him, or even kill him. Paul knew deprivation and he was not afraid of it. That was the secret he held—he knew he could get along on next to nothing. His love of Christ allowed him to continue his ministry despite some deprivations—in Paul's mind, they amounted to nothing.

Where Does Your Soul Find True Satisfaction?

The world answers this question by telling us that we find satisfaction in ease and luxury and comfort and money. The Bible, however, answers the question very differently. From Genesis to Revelation, it tells us that we find our satisfaction in God alone. Here are some examples you might find helpful to read:

- "Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee."
(Saint Augustine)
- "O God, you are my God, I seek you, / my soul thirsts for you. . . . / My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, / and my mouth praises you with joyful lips / when I think of you on my bed, / and meditate on you in the watches of the night." (Psalm 63:1, 6)

- “Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them; I kept my heart from no pleasure. . . . Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and again, all was vanity and a chasing after wind.” (Ecclesiastes 2:10-11)
- Jesus said the two most important things we must do are to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind,” and to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37, 39). If we keep our focus on these two things, we will find satisfaction for our souls and lasting contentment.

Five Steps for Simplifying Our Lives

In addition to cultivating contentment in our lives, we need to cultivate simplicity. Contentment and simplicity go hand in hand.

Set a Goal of Reducing Your Consumption, and Live Below Your Means.



Five Steps to Simplifying Our Lives

- 1 Set a Goal of reducing consumption and live below your means.
- 2 Before making a purchase, ask yourself, “Do I Really Need This?” and “Why do I want this?”

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We spent some time on this last week. We looked at how we can use our purpose in life, that personal purpose, to develop goals. And then we talked about how we need to use our resources to further those goals. When others’ goals expect us to act in other ways, we need to be firm with our strategies. What we want to be about is making sure our money is funding our life’s purpose. When we look at how we spend our money, is our purpose the thing that is foremost, or is our money being taken away by other, less important, goals?

This week, I’m asking you to set a tangible goal to reduce your own personal consumption and the production of waste in your life. Be Green! For example, use canvas bags when you go grocery shopping and refuse any extra packaging (we have cloth bags for sale here!). Whenever you are making purchases, look at the mid-grade instead of the top-of-the-line product. When buying a new car, aim to improve fuel economy over your existing car by at least 10 percent. Reduce your utilities by 10 percent by setting the thermostat back a couple of degrees when you are away during the day and asleep at night. After all, how warm does the whole house need to be for you to sleep comfortably? Find other ways to reduce your consumption and live below your means. Do some research, share ideas with others, or have a brainstorming session with your family.

Before Making a Purchase, Ask Yourself, *Do I Really Need This? and, Why Do I Want This?*

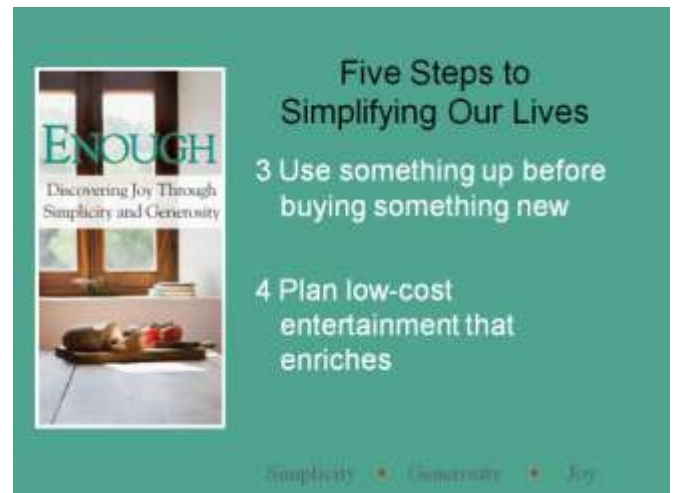
These questions will help you to determine the true motivation of your desired purchase. Is it a need, a self-esteem issue, or something else? You may find yourself wrestling with your true motive and decide that your reason for purchasing the item is not a good one.

Use Something Up Before Buying Something New.

Take good care of the things you buy and use them until they are empty, broken, or worn out. Buy things that are made to last; and, when buying things that have a short lifespan, spend your money wisely.

Plan Low-cost Entertainment That Enriches.

When it comes to choosing entertainment for your family or friends, plan things that are simple and cheap. You'll be amazed at how much more pleasure you derive from low-cost, simple activities. Last year during the Christmas season, we gathered around a pot of chili, filled ourselves with food, conversation and laughter, then went caroling, and then returned for hot chocolate. How great was that? And some folks were part of the first ever, "rolling new year's eve party" at the parsonage. Games went from 3 PM to 2 AM! We ate and laughed and had a wonderful time together. The point is this: fun can be expensive and that's OK if you've got money. But fun can also cost next to nothing.



Ask Yourself, *Are There Major Changes That Would Allow Me to Simplify My Life?*

Consider selling a car and buying one you pay for in full, downsizing your home, or getting rid of a club membership you don't use. Ask yourself questions related to your home, possessions, job, and activities to identify some significant changes that will simplify your life. Remember, if you cannot do all the things God is calling you to do and you're unable to find joy in your life, perhaps it's time to simplify in some major ways.

The Power of Self-Control



Simplifying your life requires the practice of self-control. Solomon wrote, “Like a city whose walls are broken down / is a [person] who lacks self-control” (Proverbs 25:28, NIV). When a city’s walls are broken through, the enemy can march right in and destroy it. There is no longer any protection. Likewise, self-control is a wall around your heart and life that protects you from yourself, from temptation, and from sins that are deadly and ultimately can destroy you. Self-control comes down to making a choice between satisfying an impulse to gain instant gratification and choosing not to act upon the opportunity for instant gratification for some higher cause or greater gratification later. Self-control is about forgoing instant gratification by stopping to think about the answers to three questions:

- “What are the long-term consequences of this action?”
- “Is there a higher good or a better outcome if I used this resource of time, money, or energy in another way?”
- “Will this action honor God?”

Conclusion: Which Tent Will You Live In?

Will you live in discon-**tent** or con-**tent**-ment? You and you alone determine which “tent” will be yours. You choose it in large part by deciding what life is about. If you decide that “life does not consist in the abundance of your possessions,” then you are choosing contentment. Choosing contentment means we look to God as our Source, giving thanks for what we have; we ask God to give us the right perspective on money and possessions and to change our hearts each day; we decide to live simpler lives, wasting less and conserving more; and we choose to give more generously.

