

**Welcome**

Welcome by the grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus!

Thank you for joining us. We want this to be a safe place for you to know and experience God’s love and grace. If we can help you on the next step of your spiritual journey, please let us know.

We’re on the third week of our four-part series on Finding Joy in Simplicity and Generosity. Our goal is to explore how we can be satisfied in life. We’ll look at what God says about contentment. In the process, we’ll give you some tools to look at your personal practices. Jesus spoke more often about money than anything else because the way we use our money illustrates what’s going on inside of us.

**Pastoral Prayer**

This was a challenging week. There are those who are overjoyed by the election results and there are those who are saddened by them. My prayer is for unity.

Pastor Max Lucado made a prediction about the election. He said, "I know exactly what November 9 will bring. Another day of God's perfect sovereignty. God will still be in charge. God's throne will still be occupied. God will still manage the affairs of the world. Never before has God's providence depended on a king, president, or ruler. And it won't today, tomorrow or in the future. 'The kingdom is the Lord's, and God rules over the nations' (Psalms 22:28).

Understanding God's sovereignty over the nations opens the door to peace. When we realize that God influences the hearts of all rulers, we can then choose to pray for them rather than fret about them. Rather than wring our hands we bend our knees, we select prayer over despair."

The prophet Jeremiah considered the work of God when he wrote these words: "*This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. The LORD's loving kindnesses indeed never cease, for God's compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*" (Lam. 3:21-23)

Imitate Jeremiah. Lift up your eyes. Dare to believe that good things will happen. Dare to believe that God was speaking to us when God said: "*In everything God works for the good of those who love him*" (Rom 8:28).

Dear Lord,

You are perfect. You could not be better than you are.

You are self-created. You exist because you choose to exist.

You are self-sustaining. No one helps you. No one gives you strength.

You are self-governing. Who can question your deeds? Who dares advise you? You are correct. In every way. In every choice. You regret no decision.

You have never failed. Never! You cannot fail! You are God! You will accomplish your plan. You are happy. Eternally joyful. Endlessly content.

You are the king, supreme ruler, absolute monarch and overlord of all history. An arch of your eyebrow and a million angels will pivot and salute.

Every throne is a footstool to yours. Every crown is papier-mâché to yours.

No limitations, hesitations, questions, second thoughts, or backward glances.

You consult no clock. You keep no calendar. You report to no one. You are in charge. I trust you.”<sup>1</sup> In Jesus’s name, amen.

**Sending with Blessing** Number 6:24-26

The LORD bless you, and keep you. The LORD make his face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you. The LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

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<sup>1</sup>[www.foxnews.com/opinion/2016/10/13/max-lucado-my-prediction-for-november-9.html](http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2016/10/13/max-lucado-my-prediction-for-november-9.html)

## **Message: Cultivating Contentment<sup>2</sup>**

### **Are you content? What does it mean to be satisfied?**

These are good questions. We don't usually reflect on how satisfied we are with life. In fact, we're more likely to be occupied with things that cause us to be *dis*-content or *dis*-satisfied. We often spend more time complaining than we do trying to figure out why we're discontent and how to be satisfied.

Years ago, a sculptor carved an amazing statue of a lion from a block of marble. When asked how he did it, the sculptor replied, “I just carved away everything that didn't look like a lion.” That story reminds us the way to contentment and satisfaction isn't always obvious. Believe it or not, we don't find happiness by avoiding unhappiness. We're satisfied and fulfilled when our behavior reflects our attitude, when we open ourselves to new things and look at our lives with new eyes.

**In recent years we've witnessed a number of devastating natural disasters, economic turmoil, riots and political trials.** Crises remind us everything in this world is temporary. We can lose our possessions in an instant. Jesus teaches us to “*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). Yet culture is shouting that it's not true. The result is a wrestling match in our heart and mind. We say we believe Jesus' words, but we find ourselves devoting a great deal of our time, ability and resources to acquiring more stuff. We say our lives don't consist in the abundance of our possessions, but we live as if they do.

**Here's a test you might try next time you sit down with your friends or family.** Ask yourselves this question: if a wildfire was headed toward your house and you only had ten minutes to grab whatever you could before evacuating, what would you take?

**We all struggle with discontent in some way.** Perhaps you've heard of restless legs syndrome (RLS), a condition in which one has twitches and contractions in the legs. Restless Heart Syndrome (RHS) works in a similar way, but in the heart, or soul. Its primary symptom is discontent.

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<sup>2</sup> Significant portions of text from Adam Hamilton, *Enough: Discovering Joy Through Simplicity and Generosity* program workbook, Abingdon Press, 2009

We find we're never satisfied with anything. The moment we acquire something, we scarcely take time to enjoy it before we want something else. We're always discontent. It's like being a child on Christmas morning. We're more interested in opening the packages to see how much we got, rather than enjoying the gifts for what they are, the thought behind them and what they mean.

**Discontent can be a virtue.** There's a certain discontent God intended us to have. God wired our hearts so we would be discontent with certain things, causing us to seek the only one who can fully satisfy us. We're 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, character and wisdom each passing day.

**Unfortunately, being discontent usually destroys us.** The problem is that those things we should be content with are the very things we find ourselves hopelessly discontent with. We find ourselves discontent with our stuff, our jobs, our church, our children, our spouse. God must look down on us and feel the way we feel when we give someone we really care for a special gift and he or she asks for the gift receipt. It's as if we're saying to God, “I don't like what you've given me, God; and I want to trade it in and get something better than what you gave me.” That's a sign of restless heart syndrome for sure.

**The Apostle Paul is a great example of someone who was content.** In Philippians, he wrote of the “secret” to his contentment: “...*I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me*” (Philippians 4:11-12). Like Paul, we can learn to be content, no matter what situation we may find ourselves in.

**There are four key ways to cultivate contentment,** which includes the “secret” Paul referred to in his letter.

**First, repeat these four words: “It could be worse.”** John Ortberg, pastor at Menlo Park Presbyterian Church, tells us to use these words whenever we find ourselves discontented with something or someone:

"It could be worse." Essentially, this is the practice of looking on the bright side or finding the silver lining. It's 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. This doesn't mean being falsely cheerful or optimistic, but adopting a realistic, yet positive attitude when things aren't going well.

**Second, ask yourself: "How long will this make me happy?"**

Often we buy something thinking it'll make us happy, only to find the happiness lasts about as long as it takes to open the box. There's a moment of satisfaction when we make the purchase, but the item doesn't keep bringing satisfaction over time. A lot of stuff we buy simply isn't worth the expense. That's why it's a good idea to try before you buy.

**Third, develop a grateful heart.** Gratitude is essential if we're to be content. Paul said we're to "*give thanks in all circumstances*" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). A grateful heart recognizes all of life is a gift. Contentment comes when we spend more time giving thanks for what we have than thinking about what's wrong in our lives.

Solomon, the man who literally had everything, gives us a warning:

*"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).*

**The fourth way to cultivate contentment** is to reflect on the question: "Where does your soul find true satisfaction?" The world answers by telling us we find satisfaction in ease, luxury, comfort and money. The Bible answers the question very differently. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible tells us we find our satisfaction in God alone. Saint Augustine said, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you."

The words of Psalm 63 tell us about our days and nights:

*"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).*

**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’ll find satisfaction for our souls and contentment that lasts and endures.

**That sounds strange to people who haven’t heard of Jesus** or don’t know what it means to be Christian or who are struggling with what it means to live a Christian lifestyle. They hear “help others and you’ll be content” from the Bible while the culture says, “help yourself, it’s for the taking.” To be filled up spiritually and made content, we first have to be willing to empty ourselves. The best way to do that is by helping others. When we give away what we have – our time, money, love and the hope we have in God, we empty ourselves into others only to find the Holy Spirit filling us up with even more hope, love and faith than we had before. That’s the way to true satisfaction and contentment.

**We need to simplify our lives.** In addition to cultivating contentment in our lives, we need to cultivate simplicity. Contentment and simplicity go hand in hand. There are five practical steps we can take:

**First, set a goal of reducing your consumption, and live below your means.** Set a tangible goal to reduce your own personal consumption and the production of waste in your life. For example, we can use canvas bags when we shop and refuse extra packaging. When you’re making purchases, look at the mid-range 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%. Reduce your utilities by 10% by setting the thermostat back a couple of degrees when you’re away during the day and asleep at night. 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.

For example, consider these facts:

- Each year Americans consume 1.2 billion trees to support our needs for packaging, paper, napkins and bags.
- We use 2.5 million plastic bottles every hour – mostly for water!
- Americans represent 5% of the world’s populations, yet we produce 40% of the world’s garbage, an average of 1,609 pounds/person/year.

**Second, 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 your reason for purchasing the item isn't a good one.

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

**Fourth, plan low-cost entertainment that enriches.** Plan simple and cost-effective things when it comes to choosing entertainment for your family or friends. You'll be amazed at how much more pleasure you derive from low-cost, simple activities. Quality time doesn't have anything to do with expense, but with what we're willing to give from the heart. If you're in a committed relationship, this is very important.

**Fifth, ask yourself: “Are there major changes that would allow me to simplify my life?”** Consider selling a car and buying one you can 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 changes that will simplify your life. Remember, if you can't 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 go right in and destroy it. There's no longer any protection. In the same way, self-control is a wall around your heart and life, protecting you from yourself, temptation and 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 for some higher cause or greater gratification later. Self-control is saying “no” to instant gratification.

When you're faced with an impulse, stop and answer three questions:

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

**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*” (Luke 12:15), then you're choosing contentment. Choosing contentment means looking to God as the source of our contentment and 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.

**We can learn when to say ‘no’ and when to say ‘yes’ wisely.** When you do, that's a sign of spiritual maturity and growth. You're on the path to true satisfaction and contentment, to becoming more like Christ.

Let us pray...

*Lord, cure us of restless heart syndrome. We are truly sorry for the times when we have been ungrateful for the gifts you have given us – unsatisfied with our spouse, unsatisfied with our children or parents, unsatisfied with our homes or our cars or our healthcare or our jobs. Forgive us for offending you with our discontent, and forgive us for being content with things we are not supposed to be content with. Help us to have a deep longing for you and your will for our lives. Give us the desire to pursue righteousness, holiness, justice and love. We ask these mercies in your holy name. Amen.*

**Proverbs 27:23-24 (NRSV)**

Know well the condition of your flocks,  
and give attention to your herds;  
for riches do not last forever,  
nor a crown for all generations.

**Philippians 4:11-13 (NRSV)**

Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

**Matthew 6:19-21 (NRSV)**

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”