

2 0 1 5 A U G U S T

the PASTORAL *point*

PROCLAIMING TRUTH IN A WORLD OF UNCERTAINTY

The whole advertising industry thrives by tapping into the pervasive discontentment—a discontentment they also helped create—of western culture. It's almost impossible to go for a drive without having our senses assaulted by billboards reminding us of the material things we lack. Even those who are content with their lot in life struggle to emerge unscathed from the barrage.

For the Christian, personal contentment—being satisfied with what God has given us—is a vital aspect of personal holiness and integrity. In that vein, the author of Hebrews gives us this simple exhortation: “Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have” (**Hebrews 13:5**). Contentment is fundamental to integrity because a man who is content is far less vulnerable to the worldly enticements and distractions that Satan throws at him.

But our contentment can be undermined and assaulted by the sin of covetousness. It is one of the chief ways

Cultivating Contentment

discontentment manifests itself. Covetousness is an attitude, a longing to acquire things. It means we set nearly all our attention and thought on gaining more money or having new possessions, whether we ever obtain them or not.

An encounter early in the career of wealthy oil executive John D. Rockefeller (1839–1937) illustrates this attitude. A friend reportedly asked the young Rockefeller how much money he wanted. “A million dollars,” he answered. After Rockefeller earned his first million dollars, his friend asked him how much more money he wanted. “Another million dollars,” Rockefeller replied.

Rockefeller's desires further illustrate a law of diminishing returns with regard to covetousness: The more we get the more we want, and the more we want the less satisfied we are. The Preacher (probably Solomon, one who would understand this principle very well) wrote, “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity” (**Ecclesiastes 5:10**).

According to Scripture, loving money is one of the most common ways we display covetousness. Money can be used to purchase almost anything we desire, and thus it is synonymous with lusting after material riches. Obviously, we should seek to be free from any craving for material wealth. Such a desire indicates we are trusting in riches rather than in the living God.

Paul told Timothy how he was to deal with this matter, and his command is especially applicable to Christians living in affluent Western cultures: “Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy” (**1 Timothy 6:17**).

The Lord Jesus, in perhaps His most sobering parable, gives us a strong warning about the serious pitfalls related to covetousness and materialism:

“Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.” And He told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?’

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Then he said, ‘This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.”’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?’ So is the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” (Luke 12:15–21)

The love of money and material possessions is evidenced in a variety of ways. For some people, it remains just an attitude—they never actually acquire anything. But others do acquire wealth, and for them the thrill is in adding to what they have. They love to increase their bank accounts, build up their stock and investment portfolios, or become involved in new business ventures.

Some people love money just for its own sake and find satisfaction simply in hoarding what they have. Still others are conspicuous consumers who love to buy newer, more expensive things—nicer clothes, fancier gadgets, more luxurious cars, bigger vacation homes—so they can flaunt their wealth. No matter how the love of materialism shows itself, it displeases God. We are all tempted—some of us more times than others—to compromise our testimonies and forget our integrity for the sake of material gain. But God wants us to be content.

Keys to Contentment

Scripture contains a number of practical guidelines by which we can enjoy the attitude of contentment. First, we must realize God’s goodness and believe that as our Father, He will take care of us. The apostle Paul reminds us that “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

Second, we must grasp and treasure the truth that God is omniscient. He knows our needs long before we ask Him to supply them. Jesus told the disciples, “Your Father knows that you need these things” (Luke 12:30).

The third vital ingredient for genuine contentment is that we consider what we *deserve*. We often have an inflated, self-important view of what we desire, and even more of what we *need*. But in reality, by the Lord’s sovereign design, the smallest good thing we have is far more than we deserve. Like Jacob, we are “unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which You have shown” (Genesis 32:10).

Fourth, God’s Word exhorts us to recognize His sovereign supremacy. We will not be completely content until we see that His plan is not the same for all His children. What the Father lovingly gives to one believer, He just as lovingly withholds from another (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:4–11). Hannah, Samuel’s mother, spoke wisely and to the point concerning material blessings: “The Lord makes poor and rich” (1 Samuel 2:7). We might not be comfortable with the first part of that statement, but God knows that being rich is not necessarily the best plan for us. It could even be spiritually harmful for us (as it was for the rich man in Luke 12). The Lord provides us with just what we need and nothing less.

Finally, we must keep on reminding ourselves that worldly wealth and possessions are not the true riches. Our real treasure is in heaven. So Paul calls on us to set our minds “on the things above, not on the things that are on earth” (Colossians 3:2). Ultimately, therefore, genuine contentment results from our communion with God the Father and with His Son. Material riches fade into insignificance when we draw near to Christ and are overwhelmed by the spiritual riches we have in Him.

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