

This is the third week in a 4-part series on the theme: *Enough: Discovering Joy Through Simplicity & Generosity*. Last week's message dealt with "Wisdom and Finance." Our focus today is "Cultivating Contentment." I want to say how much I appreciate the emails and comments I am receiving about how helpful and practical this series is. I think today will be very practical as well, but let's begin, as we have each week, reciting these words: "I have enough. Thanks be to God."

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As we think about contentment, I would point out that in the companion book many of us are reading, the Rev. Adam Hamilton begins this topic talking about a 2007 wildfire in Southern California where massive evacuations compelled many people to rethink their relationship to material possessions as they fled their homes.

What possessions would you grab if you had only a few minutes to evacuate? I can tell you first hand, because that fire occurred when I was pastoring in Borrego Springs which became a major fire evacuation site. In fact, there were 3 major fires in the 7 years we were in Borrego. And every time, the people who fled those fires had two things with them: photo albums and pets. At a time like that, people learn fairly quickly that Jesus was telling the truth when he said, as Luke 12:15 tells us: "Life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

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And yet we are bombarded with cultural messages trying to persuade us that Jesus really didn't know what he was talking about when he said that. "The Persuaders" is a documentary that explores how marketing and advertising have come to influence not only what we buy, but also how we view ourselves and the world around us. Let's watch and listen:

Did you catch that? Douglas Atkin, a partner in an advertising agency says that companies work to create brand loyalty by stimulating in consumers the same passionate zeal of religious cultists. They're not trying to sell us their product based on the value of the product; they're trying to convince us that our value is enhanced by their product.

Another author interviewed in this documentary says: "When you listen to brand managers talk, they can get quite carried away in this idea that they actually are fulfilling the need we have for community and narrative and transcendence. But in the end it's just...a laptop and a pair of running shoes!" Who was it in the past, that was charged with fulfilling our need for community, for narrative, and for transcendence? Priests, churches, the arts... Now, it's marketers!

Marketers know that human beings hunger for wholeness; that we are wired to seek meaning. And the primary way advertisers convince us to buy their product is the idea that it (their product) will make us more whole; more complete.

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Many, many, years ago, someone market tested that idea: that the acquisition of things can make us whole. Listen to these words from Ecclesiastes 2:10-11: "Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them; I kept my heart from no pleasure as this was the reward for my hard labor... Then I considered all that my hands had done, and the hard labor of doing it, and again, all was vanity and chasing after the wind." Do hear that? There was nothing that the writer of these words denied himself; nothing. If he wanted it, he got it, and what he learned was this: trying to find wholeness in the unchecked pursuit of material and sensory pleasure is as impossible as trying to catch hold of the wind.

As a church, we affirm that our yearning for wholeness is best met in developing a relationship with God; by cultivating a deeper prayer life, by striving to love even those we consider unlovable.

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In our companion book, Adam Hamilton outlines four keys to cultivating contentment: (Key fob)

1.) Remember: "It could be worse." I mentioned the fires where people evacuated to Borrego. Even as people were losing their homes and other cherished possessions, I recall evacuees would say things like this: "We could have lost our lives in the fire, so it could be much worse."

2.) Ask: How long will this thing make me happy? Research indicates that 98 percent of the goods that flow through our consumer economy

are not in use 6 months after they are purchased! So, for all but 2 percent of the things we buy, the answer to the question: “How long will this make me happy?” is “Not that long!”

3.) Develop a grateful heart. Be grateful for what you have. The best way to do this is by expressing gratitude! As the apostle Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, “give thanks in *all* circumstances.”

4.) And remember this: the scriptural witness is that deep satisfaction IS attainable as we focus on two things: loving God and loving our neighbor. ...

Along with these 4 Keys, finding contentment begins when we simplify our lives. What is that acronym? K.I.S.S.? “Keep It Simple *Saints*.” So here are 5 ways to simplify:

1.) **Set an intention to reduce consumption.** I’ve said it before: live below your means. Up-size your spirit by right-sizing your consumption. Three years ago we finally traded in a car with 275K mile. That car averaged 22 to 25 mpg. So we bought a used Prius, cash, that gets no less than 40 mpg. We save 4 gallons or about \$12 per each time we fill up!

2.) **Before buying something, ask: *Do I Really Need This? and Why Do I Want This?*** Try to understand your motivations!

3.) **Use it up before buying new.** Take good care of what you spend money on and buy things that are made to last. Churches can sometimes be penny wise and pound-foolish. I can’t tell you how many broken Ping-Pong tables I’ve seen at churches: purchased on special for \$150 and useful for about two weeks, just before someone sat on it and broke it. Purchasing an institutional grade table for \$500 makes much more sense in a church context.

4.) **Plan ‘Low-Cost’ enriching Entertainment.** When will we learn that sitting down to play a board-game with our kids will probably provide a more cherished memory than a trip to any amusement park? A couple of Christmas’ ago my daughter gave me a cotton candy maker knowing that it was an activity we could do together as a family. This was an outgrowth of an ideal we began 5 years ago, when we began to focus on

spending less at Christmas so that we could give more meaningfully.

5.) **Look at your budget and ask: “Are there any major changes that would allow me to simplify my life?”** Consider selling a car you don’t need, 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 significant changes that can simplify your life.

Remember brothers and sisters, if you are unable to do the things God is calling you to do with your time, with your talent, and with your treasure; it’s time to simplify so that you can focus on growing in faithfulness to God’s call upon your lives.

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In our Philippians reading Paul says, “I’ve learned how to be content in any circumstance. I know the experience of being in need and of having more than enough; I’ve learned the secret to being content in any and every circumstance, whether full or hungry or whether having plenty or being poor. I can endure all these things through *the power of the one who gives me strength*.” Paul wrote that from a prison cell as he was awaiting execution... This letter, Philippians, is known as the Paul’s letter of joy!

If you want to learn the secret of being content, memorize the prayer of Proverbs 30:7-8: “Don’t give me either poverty or wealth God; just give me the food I need. Or, I’ll be full and deny you, and say, “Who is the Lord?” Or, I’ll be poor and steal, and dishonor my God’s name.”

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The question is this, which tent do you want to dwell in: discon-**tent** or con-**tent**-ment? You determine which ‘tent’ you’ll live in when you decide what your life focus will be. Will you listen to ‘the persuaders’ who benefit most when you dwell in discon-tent-ment? Or will you invite you God to be your sole (soul) Persuader and dwell in a con-tent-ment that surpasses all understanding? Amen.