

LEARNING TO BE CONTENT

There's an old fable about a miserable rich man who went to visit a rabbi. The rabbi took the rich man by the hand and led him to a window. "Look out there," he said. The rich man looked into the street. "What do you see?" asked the rabbi. "I see men, women, and children," answered the rich man. Again the rabbi took him by the hand and this time led him to a mirror. "Now what do you see?" "Now I see myself," the rich man replied. Then the rabbi said, "Behold, in the window there is glass, and in the mirror there is glass. But the glass of the mirror has added to it a little silver. No sooner is the silver added than you cease to see others, but you see only yourself.

Today we are concluding our series on the 10 commandments. The last commandment is;

Exodus 20:17 You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

What is coveting? To covet is the uncontrolled desire to acquire. The desire to acquire in itself is not a bad thing. God made little squirrels and He gave them the desire to acquire nuts. And He made birds and He gave them the desire to acquire straw to build nests.

The world is full of all kinds of exciting, wonderful, good, desirable things and we have the desire to acquire them. That in and of itself is not a bad thing. But anything uncontrolled is a problem. God says there are some things that are off limits. They are not yours to want. They will harm you. So this desire must be controlled. It is hard, in our culture, to be content with what you have. The job of advertising is to create discontentment!

A recent survey of female teenagers discovered that 93% of female teenagers said that their number one favorite pastime was shopping. That beat out dating as the number one activity. One guy told me "If my wife doesn't go shopping at least three times a week, I send her a get well card."

Philippians 4:12-13 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

The antidote to coveting is contentment. Paul says here that he learned the secret of being content. If you like to underline things in your bible underline the word "learned". Contentment is something you have to learn. It does not come natural. I am not by nature a contented person and neither are you. It is not automatic. You have to learn to be content. It is an education process. How do you learn to be content? By doing 4 things;

1. Resist Comparing Yourself with Others

2 Corinthians 10:12 We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.

Comparing yourself with others is not wise. Comparing always leads to coveting. This verse says that it is foolish! If you are comparing yourself with others -- houses, cars, jobs, looks, clothes -- it is foolish. It's not wise. God says that doing this just creates dissatisfaction.

How do you react when you see somebody with something you like? e.g. me and my car flash. Do you say, "I wish I had that" or can you just be glad that they've got it. How do you react when you see somebody with a nicer house or more beautiful furniture? One of the greatest lessons you can learn is to learn to admire without having to acquire. I don't have to own everything to enjoy it. If the only things you enjoy are the things you own, you are going to be miserable. You cannot own everything. Learn to admire without having to acquire.

1 Timothy 6:6-10 But godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. 8 But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 9 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Things can control us. You can be possessed by your possessions if you do not watch out. When we moved to Brampton we bought a house with a pool. Maybe you are here today thinking "Pastor Steve is so lucky to have a pool – I wish our house had a pool." The truth is that I did not want a pool, but it was the best house in the right area we could find. I did not want the pool because I know that pools are a lot of work. They look so nice and relaxing but what most people do not realize is that you have to be out there cleaning it all the time and that they take a lot of money to maintain. You do not own a pool – the pool owns you. So it is with possessions.

People will sacrifice all kinds of things to get more. They will sacrifice their values, morals, integrity, family, everything they have in order to get more.

When I worked for the Yonge Street mission I was in charge of their food bank. People would come in for food and I would interview them first to find out if they really needed it. So many time people were there because they had purchased things they did not need and no longer had money for food. I remember talking with one lady who had just bought a pair of \$200 shoes for her son. I asked her why she did that and she said "well, other people buy them for their kids so why shouldn't I buy them for mine." I have never owned a pair of \$200 shoes in my life. It's all about comparisons.

People will even sacrifice relationships to get an additional dollar. Did you hear about the lady that won the lottery? She texted her live-in boyfriend and said, "I've just won the lottery. I'm now worth 17 million dollars. Start packing." The boyfriend texted back said, "Great news! Should I pack for warm weather or cold weather?" She replied, "It doesn't matter as long as you're gone by the time I get home." They'll sacrifice relationships. Stop comparing yourself with others.

2. Rejoice in What You Have

Ecclesiastes 5:19 Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work -- this is a gift of God.

Appreciate what you have and be grateful to God. Open your eyes. It is not about what you have but about the ability to enjoy what you have by recognizing that it is a gift. Everything we own is a gift from God. You came into this world with nothing and you will leave this world with nothing. During this life God has entrusted you with resources. Ultimately, everything belongs to Him. God has given you the strength to live another day so everything you make belongs to Him.

Do not get into the trap of “When and Then” Thinking. When and Then Thinking says, “*When* I get THIS, *then* I’ll be happy.” You fill in the blank. Wrong! No, you won’t. You’ll be happy for a little while but it won’t last because something else has happened.

What are you waiting on to make you happy? When I get married then I’ll be happy. When I get out of this marriage then I’ll be happy. When I have kids then I’ll be happy. When these kids get out of the house then I’ll be happy. Happiness is not a destination, it is the journey. You are as happy as you want to be. It’s your choice. Forget the When and Then Thinking. Happiness is not getting what you want, it is enjoying what you have. God wants you to enjoy what you have.

1 Timothy 6:17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

God wants you to enjoy what you have been provided with. He wants you to enjoy what you already have. Rejoice in it. As a parent, I enjoy watching my kids enjoy what I give them. No one like to give their child a toy that they hate. Likewise, God enjoys watching you enjoy what He’s given you.

An old farmer who was about to die called his two sons to his bedside and said, “My boys, my farm and the fields are yours in equal shares. I am leave you each a little money but the bulk of my wealth is hidden somewhere in the ground, not more than a foot from the surface. I regret that I’ve forgotten precisely where it lies.” When the old man was dead and buried his two sons set to work to dig up every inch of ground in order to find the buried treasure. They failed to find it but they thought that since they had gone to all the trouble of turning over the soil they thought they might as well sow a crop, which they did, reaping a good harvest. In autumn as soon as their fields were harvested they had the opportunity again to dig for the treasure. Again they did not find it, but since their fields were turned over more thoroughly than any others in the neighborhood they reaped better harvests than anyone else. Year after year their search continued. Only when they had grown much older and wiser did they realize what their father had meant. The real treasure was not buried in the ground, it was the ground. Their treasure was the land and their wealth came as a result of hard work. It is all about understanding and enjoying what you already have.

Remember, there are two ways to have enough in life: one is to get more. The other is to want less.

3. Release What You Have to Help Others

God does not just bless us for own benefit. He wants us to share it with others. He wants us to help other people with it. He’s watching you to see how much you give away. Let’s go back to the verse we just read;

1 Timothy 6:17-19 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. 19 In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

This is a very, very important verse. First, who is Paul talking to in this verse? It starts by saying “Command those who are rich...” Maybe you are thinking “I’m not rich so this verse really does not apply to me” Think again...

Here is a letter from the book *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, by P. Brand. "Dear Lord, I have been re-reading the account of the Rich Young Ruler and his obviously wrong choice. But it has set me thinking. No matter how much wealth he had, he could not; ride in a car, have surgery, turn on a light, buy penicillin, hear a pipe organ, watch TV, use a computer, type a letter, mow a lawn, fly in an airplane, sleep on an innerspring mattress, or talk on the phone, If he was rich, then what am I?"

If you are a Canadian then you are rich by the world's standards. I don't care if you're on welfare, if you are a Canadian then you are rich. In the world, the people in this room are in the top 2% of income of the world. You are rich, no matter how little you make, because you are a Canadian. This verse is talking to us. Last February I had a chance to go to El Salvador with Compassion International and I had the chance to see what real poverty looks like. In two weeks Compassion is going to be at our church and you may want to consider sponsoring a child through them.

The question is this; Is it possible to be wealthy and not be materialistic? Yes. It's possible to be wealthy but not materialistic because materialism is an attitude. You can be poor and greedy or rich and greedy. You can be poor and contented or wealthy and contented. It is the attitude and not the amount that God is talking about here.

How can I be wealthy and not materialistic? As long as you follow the four precautions in this verse. If you follow these four things then you can be as wealthy as you want and you won't be materialistic.

- a. Don't become proud of your wealth. Don't think that you are better than somebody because you have got more money than they have. Again, what you have is a gift. Recognize it.
- b. Don't put your trust in money. Don't look to it for your security. Your security is not in your bank account, it is in God. Bank accounts can be lost overnight in a million different ways. Don't put your security in money, no matter how much or how little you have.
- c. Use your money to do good. Don't waste it. If you've got a lot of money, don't squander it. Don't blow it. Use it to do good.
- d. Give cheerfully. The Bible says that the more we receive the more we are to give. Giving is the cure for the disease of materialism. Every time I give to somebody else you are breaking the grip of materialism in your life. It is saying "I can get along without this." It's a spiritual victory every time you're generous.

God says that if you do these four things then you'll be OK. You are handling wealth in the right way.

Acts 20:35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

If you know that, it is a mark of maturity. If you don't know that it's a mark of immaturity. It's thrilling, as parents, when your kids grow up to a point that they get more excited about what they're getting at Christmas than what they're getting. That's a mark of maturity.

It's true of Christians too. When you get more excited about what you give away than what you get, that's a mark of maturity. When I see my kids share with each other, as a father, it melts my heart.

When God looks down on you and sees you sharing what He's blessed you with other people who are in need, it blesses His heart.

Once upon a time there was a Miser who used to hide his gold at the foot of a tree in his garden. but every week he used to go and dig it up and gloat over his gains. A robber, who had noticed this, went and dug up the gold and ran away with it. When the Miser next came to gloat over his treasures, he found nothing but the empty hole. He raised such an outcry that all the neighbours came around him and asked what was wrong. He told them how he used to come and visit his gold. "Did you ever take any of it out and use it?" asked one of them. "Nope," he said, "I only came to look at it." "Then come again and look at the hole," said a neighbour; "it will do you just as much good." Wealth unused might as well not exist. What will be said of you?

4. Refocus on What is Going to Last

Give your attention to permanent values, things that are going to last. Reorganize your life around eternal priorities.

2 Corinthians 4:18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Everything we see around us will last only for a time. It is what we cannot see that lasts forever. Everything you see is temporary, it will not last. It is eventually going to decay or rust or wear out or fall apart. All possessions are temporary. The only things that really last for eternity are things you can't see -- relationship to God, relationship to others, values, freedom -- things you can't see.

The worse things about materialism is it clouds our vision of God. We begin to think that all there is really to life is just the things we see around us and that's so wrong. There is so much more to life than just getting things. Our perspective gets warped.

Jesus told a story about it one time. He said there was a guy who was a real successful business man and had these barns full of wheat and stuff and had a bumper crop year. He said as a result the guy said "I know what I'll do. I'll just build bigger barns." It never occurred to him to share any of it. It never occurred to him to tithe on it. It never occurred to him that there might be other things he could do with it beside store it up. God said, "You fool." Thinking all there is to life is just getting more, moving up the ladder. You're not going to take any of it with you any way. You only get to use it 60, 70 years. If you leave too much of it to your kids, it will probably ruin them. So why are you beating yourself in the head to get more and more and more. There is more to life than things.

Luke 12:15 Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

A tax officer asked an old man to declare his wealth. He declared his wealth this way: I have a mansion in heaven. I have everlasting life. I have a peace that passes all understanding. I have joy unspeakable. I have a divine love that never fails. I have a crown of life, a faithful wife, healthy, happy & obedient children, loyal friends and I sing songs in the night. The tax officer closed his book and said: "Truly you are a very rich man. But your wealth is not subject to taxation."

I think we need to do a periodic checkup and ask the tough question that says, "What am I really living for in life? Is the primary goal of my life just to get more?" What do you talk about the most? What do you spend time on the most?

Happiness does not come from possessions, it comes from knowing your purpose in life. Why in the world did God make me and why am I here. What does He want to do with my life? Where am I going when I die? Purpose.

There was a funeral in Beverly Hills. A wealthy widow who was worth millions of dollars died and people gathered around the edge of the casket. Somebody said, "It's so sad. She had so much to live for." The person next to her said, "No. She had so much to live on. She had nothing to live for."

What are you living for? You have lots to live on, what are you living for? Maybe today you need to reorganize your priorities. Are you working and worrying about things that will not last, or are you storing up treasure for yourself in heaven?

I am sure some of you have heard this story before. There's a story about a wealthy Christian who somehow got obsessed with the idea of taking some of his wealth to heaven. Now he knew the Bible clearly teaches that you can't take it with you. But so obsessed was he with this desire that he just prayed & prayed & prayed that God would give him permission to take some of his wealth to heaven with him. Finally, his persistence in prayer paid off. God spoke to him & said, "Okay, enough all ready! You can take one suitcase with you into heaven."

Well, the story continues with the man deep in thought, "What do I take? What are the most valuable things that I can put into my suitcase?" Well, he finally decided, & filled his suitcase full. Then one day he died, & when next we see him, he is slowly approaching the pearly gates dragging his suitcase behind him. St. Peter met him there at the gate & said, "Wait a minute. What do you think you're doing? You're not allowed to take anything into heaven." The man answered, "You don't understand. I have special permission from God Himself to take this suitcase into heaven."

Peter rubbed his beard & said, "Well, that's very unusual. I can't imagine God letting you do that. Let me look inside your suitcase & see what's there." So the man dragged the suitcase over, & Peter opened it to see that it was filled with gold bars & gold bricks & gold ingots. Peter said, "Well, all right. If God said so, I suppose you can take that in if you want. But why in the world did you go to all this trouble just to bring more pavement into heaven?"