

The Gift of Contentment

1 Timothy 6:6-10 on November 28, 2021

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Please read 1 Timothy 6:6-10 before going further in this transcript.

Once upon a time there was a gifted stonecutter. Each day he'd take his hammer and chisel and work on massive pieces of stone along the mountain's edge, slowly chipping away at them until they became beautiful works of art. These stone sculptures brought him a good profit, easily meeting his family's needs for food and clothing, and even a few extras from time to time. One day the stonecutter watched as the king's royal chariot passed by on the road below. A thought passed through his mind: "If only I were king, THEN I could enjoy great wealth and great power over all the people in my kingdom!" Suddenly, poof! HE became king. As he was sitting in his royal palace enjoying his riches, he thought to himself how grand it was to be king. He walked over to a window and looked out over his kingdom. Suddenly all of the land was covered in darkness. A HUGE rain cloud had completely blocked out the sun. He realized that this rain cloud was exceedingly more powerful than the king, for it not only blocked the heat of the sun but it also poured down water on everything beneath it. A thought passed through the king's mind: "If only I were a rain cloud, THEN I could be all powerful." Suddenly, poof! He became a rain cloud. He smiled as he thought to himself that the sun could not penetrate his thick cloud barrier. He grew into an ominous black rain cloud and poured out heavy rains that flooded the riverbank and caused huge mud slides. ...Then he noticed a massive mountain made out of solid rock. He poured out huge volumes of rain but the mountain... just stood there, unmoved. A thought passed through his mind: "If only I were a mountain made of solid rock, THEN nothing could overcome me. Suddenly, poof! He became a mountain made of solid rock. He looked down upon the kings of earth with their measly little kingdoms. He looked up at the rain clouds, which were NOTHING compared to HIS mighty strength. He said to himself, "ah yes, it is good to be a stone mountain, NOTHING is mightier than me!" ...The next morning he heard footsteps approaching. He looked down and noticed a man walking up to him with a hammer in one hand and a chisel in the other. The man began chipping away at the mountain's edge, slowly breaking apart the rock. A thought passed through the mountain's mind: "If only I were a stonecutter, THEN..."^{1 2}

Brother or sister in Christ, do you ever struggle to be content with your life? 1 Timothy 6:6 says, "But godliness with contentment is great gain." This

¹ Source unknown. However, see

https://teacher.scholastic.com/products/westonwoods/study_guides/the_stonecutter.pdf

² Consider 1 Corinthians 7:17-20.

verse calls us in the exact OPPOSITE direction of our human tendency to always want something more. One of the wonderful gifts of the gospel is “The Gift of Contentment.” The gospel rearranges our priorities and satisfies our human longings in a way that mere personal belongings never can. 1 Timothy 6:6 tells us that ‘godliness with contentment is great gain’ and yet, many times as Christians, we live our lives a lot like that stonecutter, striving after the next best thing, failing to rest in the gospel’s gift of godly contentment.³ Let’s be clear, we’re not talking here about lazy contentment; this is not a “pro-slacker” message. Nor is this message intended to discourage people from working hard and pursuing the dream that God has put within their hearts. 1 Timothy’s call to godly contentment is a warning against pursuing financial wealth rather than pursuing the gospel. 1 Timothy 6:6-10 shares **three ways that the Gift of Contentment protects our gospel priorities.** First of all...

1) By reminding us to live in view of eternity regarding earthly possessions. 1 Timothy 6:7-8 says, “For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.” Content with JUST food and clothing!? But what about ALL of the other stuff? What about all the Black Friday deals and Christmas gifts under the tree? Well, those things are just fine, in and of themselves. But it’s vital for us to recognize that most of those things, aren’t things that we need. Verse 7 reminds us that all of our earthly possessions are temporary: “For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.”⁴ There’s was a little boy who liked to play Monopoly with his grandma. Every time they would play, she would always whomp him. And every time they would play, she would always remind him at the end of the game: “it all goes back in the box.” You see, Grandma knew how to win at Monopoly, but she also knew the lesson of 1 Timothy 6:7. After the game of life comes to an end, all the houses and hotels and deeds of ownership will go back in the box. We CAN’T take ANYTHING with us. Living in view of eternity will transform the way we think about, our temporary possessions.⁵

Consumerism makes contentment difficult! My wife, Debbie, and I recently went on a long road trip. I can’t tell you how many different times we saw

³ 1 Timothy is a personal letter written by the Apostle Paul to his young mentor Timothy. This is the same Timothy he left in charge of overseeing the church in Ephesus, the same Timothy who traveled with him on multiple missionary journeys, and the same Timothy who Paul listed as a co-sender of six New Testament books of the Bible. If Timothy needed this advice, the warnings in this text, then so do you and I.

⁴ Some of us probably hear echoes in this from Job’s life: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb and naked I will depart.” Job 1:21.

⁵ The wisdom of Ecclesiastes 5:13-15 summarizes it this way, “I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owners, or wealth lost through some misfortune, so that when they have children there is nothing left for them to inherit. Everyone comes naked from their mother’s womb, and as everyone comes, so they depart. They take nothing from their toil that they can carry in their hands.”

billboards advertising “you DESERVE this, or you DESERVE that.” Verse 8 teaches us just the opposite, “if we have food and clothing, we will be CONTENT with that.” Now, for most of us, the Christian life doesn’t require a vow of poverty. There are examples in Scripture of Jesus calling people like the Rich Young Ruler to give away everything he owned⁶, or of people like Zacchaeus who felt compelled to give half of his possessions to the poor.⁷ But, for most of us, God simply calls us to be generous stewards of what we have. 1 Timothy 6:17-19 talks about this, “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. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. 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.” The gospel teaches us that our true riches lie in eternity, and contentment reminds us to live in view of “the coming age.” Let’s notice, that there’s no call here to take a vow of poverty, or to give away a specific percentage of all that we own. Scripture simply calls us to be generous.

Living in view of eternity is a gospel priority. So let’s pursue this wonderful gift of godly contentment. Let’s wrap it up and put it under the Christmas Tree, right alongside all of our other presents. Practicing godly contentment brings God glory because it clearly demonstrates that we trust Him fully. And so we gladly tithe 10% of our income, and we pay our taxes in obedience to Christ, and we wisely discipline ourselves to save for retirement, and we generously give some extra gifts to charity around the holidays, and we send money to various missionaries and to disaster relief, and so on. And if we were to total all of these things up, we’d maybe find that we’re actually only living on 60-70% of our total income. But that doesn’t upset us, it doesn’t bother us at all, because we’re NOT consumed by money. We’re CONTENT to live on, much less than we make.

The gospel sets us free from the rat race, from the constant striving after more and more things. From working four different jobs or working tons of constant overtime, year after year, just so we can buy things that we don’t really need. The gospel sets us free from being so busy making money, that we neglect the more important things... like time with our friends and family, and time to attend church regularly, or to be in a Life Group, or to volunteer in ministry, or to share the gospel with our neighbor. The gospel helps us put the right priorities back on our plate. Our joy and fulfillment in this life is found in Christ alone, who, through the gospel, has already given us great gain. A gain greater than any paycheck or any uptick in the stock

⁶ See Mark 10:21.

⁷ See Luke 19:8.

market could ever give us: the gain of ETERNAL life. The Gift of Contentment also protects our gospel priorities...

2) By warning us about the dangers of loving money. 1 Timothy 6:9-10 says, "Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil...." When Jesus was asked "which is the greatest commandment," He answered: "love the Lord your God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself."⁸ The desire for riches tempts us away from God's priorities. It becomes an idol that we begin to love, serve, and worship. We become worshippers of things rather than worshippers of God. 1 Timothy says that these desires are foolish and harmful. That word "plunge" gives us the sense of something being thrust under water. God wants to spare us from being drowned in ruin and destruction. Just to be clear, this passage does not teach that money itself is bad, but rather that the LOVE of money is bad, our greediness for it, is what's bad. Money, in and of itself, is neutral. However, money does reveal where our affections lie. Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."⁹ This passage says that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, not all evil, but all KINDS of it. Certainly, there are other sources of evil in our world besides greed. However, the love of money is one of most common sources of evil. Let's think about that...

The love of money causes people to lie, cheat, steal, betray, backstab, and so on. Just think about how many of our relationships are ruined by the love of money. Placing too much importance on money hurts our friendships, our marriages/families, our church relationships, our business partnerships, and so on. Wanting to get rich ruins/destroys healthy gospel relationships. Gospel priorities set us free from the love of money, so that we can focus on loving God, and loving our neighbors as ourselves, rather than competing with them for who can get the most toys. Do you remember the old TV game show, "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?" Who DOESN'T want to be a millionaire!? This show was incredibly popular for a long time. Things like the Powerball lottery and the all the new casinos that continue to pop up all over the country, PROVE that our love for money is as strong as ever. These kinds of things reveal a lot about our society's ongoing desire to be rich. It's so fun to dream about what we could buy if we had a million dollars. In fact, if one of us in this room, or watching via livestream, were to suddenly win a million dollars, I honestly believe that many of us would be excited to be generous toward others. The problem, however, is that it's just way too easy for us humans to deceive ourselves.¹⁰ In other

⁸ See Matthew 22:34-40 and Mark 12:28-34.

⁹ Matthew 6:21.

¹⁰ Consider Jeremiah 17:9.

words, we justify our desire to get rich with our intention to use the money wisely. Consider the advice in the very next verses, in 1 Timothy 6:11-12, "But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses." Brother or sister in Christ, let's flee from the love of money; let's run away from it! Let's fall deeply in love with godly contentment! Keep in mind, when Paul wrote this to Timothy, it probably wasn't because Timothy himself was rich. So the reminders and warnings that we find in this passage, aren't JUST for those of us who are "rich," they are also for those of us who are "poor" and "middle-class." This passage warns ANYONE who WANTS to get rich, whether it's the rich wanting to get richer, or the poor wanting to get rich in the first place. This passage is warning every fully devoted follower of Jesus about the dangers of loving money. This Gift of Contentment also protects our gospel priorities...

3) By keeping us from wandering from our faith. 1 Timothy 6:10 goes on, "...Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." This faith, is the very faith, that the gospel has provided for us. But an eagerness for money, has the capacity to be so powerful in our lives, that it can pull us away from our devotion to Jesus. I ask you: what could be more dangerous than that!?¹¹ Thus, Timothy is urged to pursue godliness with contentment rather than allowing eagerness for money to cause him to wander from his faith. Paul is particularly concerned for Timothy because of all the false teachers around him, who were getting their priorities out of whack. 1 Timothy 6:5 says that these false teachers viewed godliness as a means to financial gain. So then, even Christian teachers and pastors can be led astray by eagerness for money. We All need to watch out! It's interesting to note that these people in verse 10 who were "eager for money" are said to have "pierced THEMSELVES with many griefs." To put it another way, these wounds are self-inflicted.¹² There's no one else to blame. They have been deceived, duped by their own greed. Their only hope is to humbly admit the error of their ways, and turn back to a life of godliness with contentment.

This phrase "eager for money" is what grammarians call a causative participle. What that means is that "eager for money" is the cause of "wandered from the faith."¹³ Can you picture this? We're walking in our

¹¹ The entire book of 1 Timothy actually begins/ends by mentioning those who have wandered from the Christian faith. Early on in 1 Timothy 1:6, Paul begins by talking about some who have departed from a sincere faith. He mentions them again at the end of this letter, in the very last verse of his book, 6:21 mentions those who "have departed from the faith."

¹² Hiebert, D. Edmond, *First Timothy*, Moody, Chicago, IL, 1957, p. 115.

¹³ The picture that Paul seems to have in mind here is of someone stretching out and reaching for the money, as they are at the same time walking along in their faith. This eagerness for money, causes them

Christian faith along the path that God has laid out for us. As we look to the side, we see opportunities for extra money and possessions. We tell ourselves that we are fully committed to staying on the path, but there's no harm in reaching out to the edges just a little, to grab a few extras. We convince ourselves that we won't actually walk OFF of God's path, we'll just slow down a little, turn to the side just a smidge, and lean out there just a tiny, little bit.¹⁴ But what happens is that we end up not only coming to a complete halt in our Christian life and service, but then also moving in a completely new direction, well off of the path. We probably didn't intend to at first, nonetheless, that's where we end up, tempted away by our desire for money and possessions.¹⁵

After thinking through 1 Timothy 6:6-10, we may find ourselves asking a question: "So how do we find genuine contentment?" How do we get to that place in our lives, where we sincerely stop wanting more stuff, and where we start feeling genuine satisfaction with what we already have? Getting to a point of genuine contentment is a process, of letting the gospel work its way deeply into our lives, more deeply than just a ticket to heaven. We need to allow the gospel to mold us and to shape us, until OUR priorities become GOSPEL priorities.

to wander off the path. Knight, George W. III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, IL 1992, p. 258.

¹⁴ At this point, I can't help but think about the hobbits being told by Gandalf NOT to leave the path through Mirkwood Forest. See <https://www.brenthartinger.com/blog/2018/7/3/dont-leave-the-mirkwood-trail-a-masterclass-is-good-writing>

¹⁵ You see, wandering tends to be a rather subtle process, at first, an almost imperceptible change in direction. Ultimately though, we end up off of God's path for us.