

Message: True Satisfaction¹**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 preoccupied with things causing us to be *dis*-content or *dis*-satisfied. We may 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.” This 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.

Recently, we've experienced a pandemic, natural disasters, injustice, racism, economic turmoil, riots and political challenges. Crises remind us everything in this world is temporary. We can lose our possessions, our health, even our lives, in an instant. Jesus teaches us, “*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's not true. The result is a wrestling match between 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 and 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?

¹ Portions of text from Adam Hamilton, *Enough: Discovering Joy Through Simplicity and Generosity* program workbook, Abingdon Press, 2009

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 our soul. Its primary symptom is discontent. 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’d be discontent with earthly things, causing us to seek the only One who can fully satisfy us. We’re meant to yearn to know God more, cultivate a deeper spiritual life, pursue justice and holiness, love others more, and grow in grace, character and wisdom each day.

Unfortunately, being discontent derails us. 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 leaders, our church, our children, and 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 they ask 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. He wrote about 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 going hungry, of having plenty and 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. The secret: knowing Christ better each day.

What does a content life look like? The words of Psalm 63 give us a picture. "*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). A content life is one where we experience God in every moment.

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 which lasts and endures.

This 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 change their lifestyle and live a spiritual life. They hear "help others and you'll be content" from Christians 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 so is by helping others. When we give away what we have – our time, money, love and the hope we have in Jesus, we empty ourselves into others only to find a surprising thing. The Holy Spirit fills us up with even more hope, love and faith than we had before. Our cup must be emptied to be refilled, over and over. That's the way to true satisfaction, without fear.

John tells us "*There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.*" (1 John 4:18). "When John says perfect love drives out fear, he's pointing to God's divine love. He isn't speaking about human affection, psychological compatibility, mutual attraction, or deep interpersonal feelings. All of those have value and beauty, but the perfect love John speaks about embraces and transcends all feelings, emotions, and passions. The perfect love driving out all fear is the divine love we're invited to participate in. The home, the intimate place, the place of true belonging, is, therefore, not a place made by human hands. It's fashioned for us by God, who came to pitch his tent among us, invite us

to his place, and prepare a room for us in her own house.”² When we’re no longer afraid, we’re confident and assured. In short, we’re satisfied.

I believe, we also need to simplify our lives. To find contentment, we need to cultivate simplicity. Contentment and simplicity go hand-in-hand. You may want to ask yourself: “What changes would allow me to simplify my life?” You may want to consider paying down a debt, selling a car, 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 ways to 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.

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. Self-control helps. It is a fruit of the spirit. Self-control is a shield for your heart and life, protecting you from yourself, temptation and sins which deaden and kill our spirit and, ultimately, can destroy us. 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 satisfaction later. Self-control is saying “no” to instant gratification.

When you’re faced with an impulse, I suggest you pause 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?”

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

Next week, our series will conclude with a reflection on living generously. I invite you to join us then.

² Henri Nouwen Society, *Daily Meditation*, February 2, 2022

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’ve 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 that should disturb or dissatisfy us. 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.

Philippians 4:11-13 (CEB)

I’m not saying this because I need anything, for I have learned how to be content in any circumstance. I know the experience of being in need and of having more than enough; I have 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.

Matthew 6:19-21 (CEB)

“Stop collecting treasures for your own benefit on earth, where moth and rust eat them and where thieves break in and steal them. Instead, collect treasures for yourselves in heaven, where moth and rust don’t eat them and where thieves don’t break in and steal them. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”