

**Christ Presbyterian Church**  
**Edina, Minnesota**  
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**John Crosby**  
**Satisfied: Being Content | I Timothy 6:2-10, Philippians 4:11**

Our friend, John Ortberg, tells a story about a little girl, a young girl, whose parents took her to a shrine one day. The shrine was very distractive because as you went in there were these enormous gold arches. It was a very special place, and she had an opportunity there to get a combination of food and something that would fulfill her life—a little toy that some marketing genius had put together. It was a special kind of meal; it was a Happy Meal! Some of you may have had it. She turned to her parents and said, “Oh, please, please can I have it? I can’t live without this. I have to have it!” And her parents said, “No, honey, it’s just a stupid little marketing tool. They mark up the price; it’s not worth it and it’s not in the budget. Sorry. Let’s just get a burger.” She knew that they didn’t understand. She knew she wouldn’t just be buying french fries, McNuggets, and a shake; she would be buying happiness itself. She was convinced that she had a little McVacuum in her heart and like Augustine said so perfectly, “Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in a Happy Meal.” No. But she explains, “I want that Happy Meal more than anything I’ve ever wanted in my whole life. If you give it to me I will never complain again. I will never ask you for anything again, I will never be spoiled again. If you give me the Happy Meal I will be content for the rest of my life.” The dad looked at the mom and said, “It’s fifty-eight cents, let’s give it a shot”, and they bought it for her and it worked. It worked. This young woman grew up to be grateful and joyful. She lived with grace and serenity. In many ways she had a hard life. The man she married abandoned her with three small children to raise by herself. The kids were a disappointment—they dropped out of school, they sponged off her meager resources, and then they abandoned her too. In her old age, social security was not enough and she found that she was often living hand to mouth, but she never complained because she had gotten the Happy Meal. She’d think of it often—*I remember that Happy Meal. What incredible joy I found there*—and just as she predicted, it brought her great satisfaction. She was grateful the rest of her life for that Happy Meal.

Does life actually work like that? Are we she sure she wasn’t whining by the time they left the driveway at McDonald’s? You’d think that after a while kids would catch on or at least their parents would catch on. You know, a Happy Meal never brings lasting happiness. *I’m not going to get suckered into it again. It won’t happen.* But then next time, when the excitement wears off and they need another fix, they have another Happy Meal—maybe super-sized—and they keep buying them and they keep not working. As a matter of fact, the only one that Happy Meals bring lasting joy to is Ronald McDonald. Look at the stupid grin on his face. Billions and billions sold. You tell that story and you think, *ah, that’s for kids. Only a child would be so naïve. Only a child would be foolish enough to believe that a change in your circumstance would bring joy that would last.* That a new job would make everything better, that a relationship would make you happy, that kids would change the course of your life, or that the right school

would set everything okay. Nobody would believe that, would they? Maybe when you get older you don't get smarter; maybe your Happy Meals just get more expensive.

All day long you and I are bombarded with messages that say two things: first, not, "You're a loser," but they say, "You are incomplete. You cannot live happily the way you are." And the second thing they say is, "If you get this you will be happy. Use me, buy me, eat me, wear me, try me, drive me, put me in your hair." Just think about it. The things that we talk about to bring contentment for your hair. Staggering! Futile! You can wash it, condition it, mouse it, dry it, curl it, straighten it, wax it. You can laser it if it's growing where it shouldn't, or Rogaine it if it's not growing where it should. People today are healthier and cleaner and richer, and they live longer, and they eat better, and they dress warmer, and they work less, and they vacation more than in the entire history of planet earth. And they have better hair than they've ever had! But are we happier or are we just cleaner, healthier, better coiffed versions of discontented people? Is there in your life, either in your soul or in the life of someone that you know, a not so subtle search for the next Happy Meal and that will do it? *If the news on the next cancer test is good, then I'll be happy. If I only had this then I would be happy.* And that runs right in to the Feast of the Epiphany--that when people come to this little baby king, they bow down, they give Him gifts fit for a king, and then they are told to go home by a different way. And Jesus talks about going home a different way.

This whole idea of a culture that consumes...Jesus says, "Where your treasure is, there is your heart. Be on your lookout for all kinds of greed. Life isn't about the number of possessions; you can't serve both God and money." Then He says, "I have come to make your life miserable." No! Jesus says, "I have come to show you what real life can look like." Jesus wants us to discover contentment in a culture of consumption. And occasionally that works, but so often people believe in Jesus and don't go home another way. So often our culture would say that there is no difference at all between the buying patterns of people who go to church every week and the buying patterns of people who don't believe in God. No difference in the amount of satisfaction that religious and non-religious people experience when they're being honest. Apparently we have not found how to go home a different way. Some of the very earliest followers of Jesus were being taught that there is another way. That's what Laura lifted out in the life of the apostle Paul. He wrote that—Paul wrote that—to his protégé, the guy he was grooming to take his place. He was an old man and he says this, "I've discovered this: godliness with contentment. That's the great gain. We brought nothing into the world and we will take nothing out of it, but if we have even just food and clothing, we'll be content with that." I don't know that I could say that, but I want to. I want to have that knot in my stomach, that fear that I'm somehow missing success, unclenched a little. Paul not only said that he had learned to be content in every circumstance, he showed how it would happen.

There was a church in Philippi—tiny little church—that hears that Paul is stuck in a place for a long time, so they send him a gift and Paul receives it. How many of you grew up in an environment—a family or surrounded by people—where you write a thank you note when you get a gift? Write thank you notes. Kids, it's an invention, it's called paper. I was always taught to write thank you notes and that's what this letter is. Paul, in

the letter to the Philippian church, writes a thank you note because they've sent him a gift. He gives a lot of different advice and finally at the end he says, "I want to thank God for your gift."

10 I want to thank God for your gift because it shows how much you've always cared for me. 11 I'm not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content all the time. [Listen to that. I have learned to be content all the time. I want that.] 12 I've experienced times of need and times of abundance. I've been in the penthouse and the prison house. In every circumstance I have learned the secret of contentment, whether it's satisfied or hungry, with plenty or with nothing. 13 I am able to do all things through the One who gives me strength. [Paraphrase of Philippians 4:10-13]

And then at the end he says, "But nevertheless, thank you. It was a lovely gift. It was good of you to share." The thing that makes it so unusual, so striking, is that Paul is not resting between missionary journeys, Paul is writing this thank you note from jail, unsure of whether he'll ever get out of prison. So, I just want to ask you which path you've taken home? It says the wise men went home by a different way. Are you more and more satisfied, more and more filled with contentment, or do you still have anxiety? You feel that you are just one thing—you know what it is—one thing away from being contented, from making it. What does it mean to live a contented, satisfied life as a follower of Jesus? In a consumer-driven, debt-ridden society, what does it mean to be satisfied regardless of the circumstances? I want this so much for you. I want us to experience this because I believe this would be a true marker, and that people who come into this community would, over time, say, "You know, they don't seem to be as scared. They don't seem to be as driven, they aren't as hassled or as worried...what's the word? They seem content." I have to tell you, that's the hunger of the human heart.

Jesus talks all the time about stuff. Jesus talks about stuff to His followers more than I talk to you about stuff. And He does that because it's important. He says, "Where your treasure is, there's your heart. You can't serve two masters." He said, "I come that you may have life."

Jake [Kirchner] started us off last week by talking about the story of Jesus that Luke wrote, talking about the beginning when Jesus started to go around His Israel world. I'd like to go forward from that. Jesus would go someplace and teach. He'd walk along the roads, the crowds would follow Him, and He would teach them on the road. Then He'd get to a new place and start up again. In the middle of the story in chapter 12, He is apparently walking and teaching at the same time. The crowd is following, and suddenly out of the crowd a man calls out to Him and says,

13 "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." [Luke 12:13]

Apparently his dad has just died, the older brother is in control of the inheritance, and this young man is feeling like he is being cheated. He is discontent. He says, "Jesus, Teacher, tell them to do the right thing." Jesus stops and says, "Oh, you're absolutely right. I'll go immediately and tell them to give you everything." No!

14 Jesus replied, “Man, who made Me Judge Judy? I am not appointed to be a judge between the two of you.” 15 Then he replied to the crowd, “Watch out! Be on guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” [Paraphrase of Luke 12:14-15]

So, Jesus is saying—on the road taking a different way home— life doesn’t consist of the abundance of possessions. He’s saying you are not what you own. Clothing covers me, it does not define me. My car transports me, it does not identify me. My house shelters me, it does not give me worth. Your savings account gives you margin, it does not give you worth. Life is not found in the abundance of possessions, and many of us—many of you, many of us—need to hear that. There is a difference between my worth and my net worth. One more will not make the difference.

So, Jesus has this encounter with this guy on the road, and the guy walks away thinking, *okay, I feel a little guilty; I feel greedy. I’ll work it out.* But then he has what everybody who’s ever been a parent calls a “teachable moment.” The child comes up to you and the lamp is in two parts, one in her left hand and one in her right, and you have a teachable moment. Do you make it about justice or grace? Jesus sees a teachable moment here, and He turns to the crowd and tells them a story.

16 “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. 17 He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ 18 “Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. 19 And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.” 20 “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ 21 “This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.” [Luke 12:16-21]

Now, some of us are thinking—things bad, God good. No! It’s not either/or; it must be both/and. It’s not that He’s saying, “That was not bad.” You should say, “It was that he is not rich in his heart toward God.” That was the mortal peril for him. It’s called the Parable of the Rich Fool because as you look at it, the land of a certain man produced a great crop. Most of you think it’s because of your hard work and savings and diligence and real good habits, and some of that is absolutely right. A lot of it is what you bring to it. A lot of it is that you were born on second base, and we take credit for things beyond us like the rich fool did. Some things are in our control; some are not. Then there is the difference in the story between making money and holding onto it. If I hold onto it then I will be secure and I will determine the future, but God says, “Only I determine the future. Only I know what time it is for you.” But we all know what we are doing right now, and they all knew—especially the rich man—that he had not been rich toward God.

I love the image that Jesus draws—full barns, empty soul. I see that a lot. Great bank accounts, spiritually bankrupt. We are all in danger of becoming financially independent and spiritually bankrupt and the reason I know that’s true is because it happens to me. I

think the reason that we will become content is only if first we see the danger. And the danger frankly, is that it doesn't happen all at once. These are the accumulation of little choices time, after time, after time. We lose our way one step at a time because it's often just that *one more thing*. That's the lie. It's just that one more thing. In just a window of insight into my life—it is if I could just find a house that Laura would love that would give us all kinds of financial margin. If I could do that then we would be fine. It's a lie. The house doesn't exist by the way. It's a lie because that one thing will turn into one more thing, and one more thing, and on and on. That's the second reason the rich fool gets trapped—his greed is invisible to him, just as your greed is invisible to you. You are discontented because you have not learned the secret of satisfaction.

In studies, people will admit that they have lied. In studies, to a surprising degree, people will admit that they have cheated, or they have stolen small things, or that they have hurt other people. Almost no one in any study will admit they are greedy. Nobody identifies themselves as greedy. Nobody identifies themselves as materialists. It's all of them. Right now many of you have already ordered this tape to give to one of them, but we're all in danger because it happens one step at a time and it happens invisibly.

Let me talk about contentment. Contentment is the cultivation of a satisfied heart. I want your heart to be satisfied, at rest—being fully alive to God, recognizing more often that God is here and fully present to other people. Whatever our material circumstances, contentment is the cultivation of a satisfied heart. Paul says, "I have learned the secret of contentment. It's the satisfied heart." That means that I need to train my heart, because by its natural path I want just one more thing, just one more Happy Meal. I need to train my heart with practices.

I told you that we're going to have a couple of practices—two very easy ones that I want you to do this week. The first one is to **open your eyes** because we just don't see that we are swimming in a sea of stuff. I told you it never happens until the moving van comes or the fire truck leaves, but what if you were to go today or tomorrow to your closet and you were to count your shirts? That's all you've got to do this week. Count your shirts. Don't count my shirts, count your shirts. I've been married for 34 years, my mother-in-law has given me 50 shirts and I never give away a shirt that my mother-in-law has given me. But they accumulate and they don't wear out, so I just keep them and they grow and then all of a sudden I have to count them and I go, *ohhh, how did that happen?* Count your shirts and make sure you differentiate between the long-sleeved, and the short sleeved, and the t-shirts...because the t-shirts tell a different story. The t-shirts are what we all have when we work out, when we stay in shape, and it seems every time you go to an athletic event or sign up for a golf tournament, you get another one. Some of them you can throw away because they're ugly, but some of them you will have until you die because they have a special place in your heart, a signal from God. So, practice number 1: count your shirts and for some of you, count your shoes. Those are my shoes (shows picture)...12 pairs. Some of them are so old they walk by themselves! I can't throw them out, but count your shoes. Another house may have shoes that looks like this (shows a picture of a large walk-in closet). This is not my wife's closet. Each of us has it structured differently. You need to see how much you have,

because you have more than you thought. At what point will more be enough? Open your eyes.

The second thing is **open your hands**. One time this week go to the storage locker, open the closet, go down in the basement, and look at something you own that is of value that you don't use—something of value, not that ugly thing that you never really liked anyway. Maybe it's a Keurig, but then somebody gave you a better Keurig, and this one sits down there. Could be a microwave, works just fine, but you have a different size. It is . . . fill in the sentence yourself. Take that good thing, which is a good thing, and give it away. This week, find one thing that is a good thing and give it away, either to a friend who needs it, or to the Goodwill. There ought to be a glut at Goodwill in the next seven days! All of us can do this and it won't hurt you; it will free you.

When I went down into the basement to catch the last twenty-two pairs of shirts, I saw this (holds up leather jacket). Great jacket, I love this jacket! This jacket actually looks good on me. I haven't worn this jacket in four years. It needs to look good on somebody else. So it will and you know what? I will be free of it. They will be blessed by it and I will be free of it.

We have taken the first class in the school of contentment. We are on the way home by a different way, but if we are to go to a home where we will be satisfied in our hearts instead of waiting for the Happy Meal, if we will go home by a different way with Jesus, we need to have traveling companions. That's why I want you to do this with other people; it's hard to do by yourself. And maybe you should gather with those traveling companions around a table. Maybe that table could look like this (John shows the Communion table). Maybe on the way home by a different way you would hear a voice at that table that says, "This is My body broken for you." Maybe you would see someone with a fine glass of wine lifted up and saying, "This is the blood of the new covenant. Pour it out for the forgiveness of your sins. When you eat this bread, when you drink this cup, you've proclaimed the Lord Jesus' death until He comes again." We invite you—before you go home by a different way—to come to the table where it all happens. Paul says that the secret of contentment is that he has learned that he can do all things through the One who gives him strength. Here is where you find that strength.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*