

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*Covetous to Content.*"

On Sunday morning's we've been in a series on covetousness. This morning we're going to transition to discussing contentment, and here's why...

Scripture is clear:

- If we want to stop something – in this case coveting – we must start something else
- If we want to put off covetousness, we must put on contentment

We've discussed the principle of putting off and putting on before, so I'm not going to spend too much time on it, but b/c this practice is repeated in Scripture, it tells me it should also be repeated in my sermons.

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The clearest place discussing it is **Eph 4**. Let me briefly share some of the verses w/ you to remind you what it looks like...

Let's say you struggle w/ lying. Look at **verse 25** to see how to avoid this sin...

- **Eph 4:25 Therefore, having put away falsehood:**
  - This is what you repent of...
  - This is what you put off...
- Then it says **let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor.**
  - This is what you start...
  - This is what you put on...

So if you have a problem w/ lying, it's not enough to simply stop lying: you have to make a conscious effort to tell the truth. This probably means:

- Concentrating on your speech
- Ensuring what you say is accurate and correct

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Let's say you struggle w/ stealing. Look at **verse 28**...

- **Let the thief no longer steal,**
  - This is what you repent of...
  - This is what you put off...
- Then it says **but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.**
  - This is what you start...
  - This is what you put on...

I want to spend one more moment on this example, b/c it relates so closely to covetousness and contentment...

Paul says, **rather let him labor**. Why do most people **labor**...especially people struggling w/ covetousness?

To have more and more for themselves. In other words, they **labor** – NOT so that [they] may have something to share with anyone in need – but so that they may have [more for themselves].

In our consumer-driven society:

- We don't tend to labor according to our need
- We tend to labor according to our greed

We constantly seek to raise our standard of living, but if we want victory over covetousness we should:

- Raise our capacity to give
- Raise our ability to **have something to share with anyone in need**

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One way we can tell whether we struggle w/ covetousness is by asking:

- Who are we working for?
- Who is the recipient of all of our stuff?
- Like **Jam 4:3** says do **[we want] to spend it on [our] passions?**

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Look at the next example...

If you have a problem w/ the way you talk...

- **Verse 29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths,**
  - This is what you repent of...
  - This is what you put off...
- Then it says **but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.**
  - This is what you start...
  - This is what you put on...

It's not enough to simply stop saying unwholesome things. You have to consciously speak encouraging words that edify and build up.

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Finally skip to verse **31** where Paul sums it up:

- **31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.**
  - Repent of all this
  - Put off all this
- **32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.**
  - Produce this...
  - This is what you put on...

If someone has genuinely repented of the sins in **verse 31**, then they'll produce the fruit listed in **verse 32**.

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You probably noticed the verses are presented in opposing pairs:

- Whatever you repent of, you try to produce the opposite

- This is important to keep in mind b/c this isn't an exhaustive list of sins:
  - If there's a sin in your life that's not mentioned, think of the opposite of that sin.
  - More than likely that's what you need to produce.

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So if we want victory over covetousness:

- It's not enough to simply say, "I will stop coveting."
- We must put on contentment.

And this brings us to Lesson 1...

## LESSON 1: PUT OFF COVETOUSNESS, AND PUT ON CONTENTMENT.

There's a very close relationship between covetousness and discontentment...you can imagine that, right?

- We covet b/c we're discontent w/ what we have.
- We think we'll finally be happy – or content – if we can just get this one thing we're coveting.

This is how covetousness destroys contentment.

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Covetousness and contentment are mutually exclusive:

- To be covetous is to be discontent
- To be content is to not covet

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As we've discussed covetousness over the last few weeks, hopefully you've recognized it makes us slaves:

- When we covet something, it keeps us chained up.
- The only way to be freed from it is to cast it off...or put it off.

This is why contentment is the true path to freedom

John White said, "*Freedom is an inner contentment with what you have. It means to covet only heavenly treasure.*"<sup>i</sup>

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I'm going to share some statistics w/ you...

We live in the richest nation in the world. We have more than everyone else combined...but how much richer are we?

Disposable income is the amount of money households have for spending and saving after income taxes have been accounted for:

- Russia's disposable income is less than \$17,000.
- France's disposable income is \$60,000.
- The United Kingdom's disposable income is \$83,000.
- Canada's disposable income is \$86,000.
- The nation in second place is Switzerland w/ \$128,000.

- First place is the US w/ a disposable income of \$176,00, which is almost 40% more than the nation in second place.<sup>ii</sup>

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There are 7.5 billion people in the world:

- China is the world's most populous nation w/ 1.4 billion people, which is almost 20% of the world's population (18.6%). It has 10.5% of the world's wealth.
- The US has 327 million people, which is a little more than 4% of the world's population...but we have almost 42% (41.6%) of the world's wealth. <sup>iii</sup>

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In the US, the poverty threshold for a family of five is \$30,500. In other words, if a family of five makes less than \$30,500 per year, they're considered living in poverty.<sup>iv</sup> The official poverty rate in the US is 12.3%, or about 40 million (39.7) people.<sup>v</sup>

The average global income for a family of five is about \$10,500 (\$2,100 for an individual x 5), which means the people in poverty in our nation still make about 3 times more than the average income for the rest of the world.<sup>vi</sup> In other words, even our "poor" people are still three times wealthier than the average person in the rest of the world.

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Maybe you're saying, "Well, things are more expensive for us in the US!"

That's true, but even after adjusting for cost-of-living differences, a typical American still earns an income that is 10 times higher than the income received by the average person in the rest of the world.<sup>vii</sup>

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Last statistic...

In the US an annual income of \$32,400 doesn't seem very high, but it's a salary that puts people among the top 1% of earners in the world.<sup>viii</sup>

Back in 2011 the Occupy movement took place w/ many people protesting income distribution. Their slogan was, "We are the 99%."

It referred to the concentration of wealth among the top 1% compared to the other 99 percent of the population...which these people claimed to be part of.

The irony is if they made at least \$32,400 – which I suspect they did – then they weren't in the 99%. They were in the 1%.

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Since the US is so rich:

- You'd expect us to be the happiest – or most content – nation:
- You'd think that right now I'd be standing in the easiest place – not just in the whole world, but in all of history – to preach a sermon on contentment
  - No nation in in all of history should have as easy of a time being content as us

But this is far from the case...and this brings us to Lesson 2...

## LESSON 2: CONTENTMENT CAN'T BE FOUND FROM WEALTH.

This past week I spent a few hours looking at different articles – I'd guess about 20 or more – about depression and suicide.

I tried to pull out some of the most staggering statistics, which I want to share w/ you.

A recent study published in the Journal of Abnormal Psychology concluded that since the late 2000s, the mental health of teens and young adults has declined dramatically:

- Between 2009 and 2017 rates of depression, attempted suicides, and “serious psychological distress” among kids up to young adults, ages 12 to 21, has increased by 51%.
- More than one in eight Americans ages 12 to 25 experienced a major episode of depression<sup>ix</sup>
- The CDC reports that between 2007 and 2016 rates of suicide jumped 56%.<sup>x</sup>
- Get this: suicide is now the second leading cause of death among people ages 10 to 34.<sup>xi</sup>

We're rich...and depressed! Clearly wealth and possessions don't make us content!

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You might wonder two things:

1. First, why such a dramatic increase in the last decade?
2. Second, why such a dramatic increase among young people?

Any guesses?

Social media!

- Social media increases depression and loneliness<sup>xii</sup>
- Or another way to say it is social media destroys contentment!

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Jean Twenge is a professor of psychology at San Diego State University, and the author of *iGen*, a book about how technology affects the lives of young people. She said:

*“There was one change that impacted the lives of young people more than older people, and that was the growth of smartphones and digital media like social media, texting, and gaming. [While older adults also use these technologies] their adoption among younger people was faster and more complete, and the impact on their social lives much larger.”*

She explains the way young people communicate and spend their leisure time has:

*“Fundamentally changed. They spend less time with their friends in person and less time sleeping, and more time on digital media.”<sup>xiii</sup>*

In a study that examined the “Association between screen time and depression among US adults,” I read:

*“Activities that benefit mental health – including sleep and face-to-face interaction with friends and family – have declined as American youths have deepened their engagement with digital media. A substantial amount of research has found associations between heavy technology use and poor mental health outcomes among adolescents and young adults.”<sup>xiv</sup>*

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Another article in the *Child Mind Institute*, was titled, “Does Social Media Cause Depression.” Here’s part of it:

*“Evidence is mounting that there is a link between social media and depression. In several studies, teenage and young adult users who spend the most time on Instagram, Facebook, and other platforms were shown to have a substantially higher rate of reported depression – [up to] 66% – more than those who spent less time.”<sup>xv</sup>*

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Lisa Damour is a clinical psychologist who specializes in treating adolescents and young adults, and she attributed the increased rates of depression to:

- Being socially isolated
- Not getting enough sleep (often because social media interferes)
- And listen to this: stress from the world’s problems.<sup>xvi</sup>

There’s a duality associated w/ the way social media connects us:

- It’s good in that it connects us to more people, so we’re more aware of people’s problems, we can pray for them, give financially to their needs, share their struggles...bear each other’s burdens as Gal 6:2 says.
- But it’s bad in that it connects us to more people so we’re ore aware of people’s problems...and that weighs on us.

Suddenly, instead of knowing:

- One person w/ cancer, we know 20 people w/ cancer
- One person who lost his job, we know 20 people who lost their jobs
- One person who died, we know 20 people who died
- One person who got in an accident, we know 20 people in accidents

We have the struggles and suffering of so many more people weighing on us.

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And there’s one more way social media negatively affects all of us...

Oren Miron is a research associate in biomedical informatics – whatever that is – at Harvard Medical School. He says social media may be contributing to rising suicide rates, particularly for young people because it, “[leads] to fewer meaningful in-person interactions—which can protect against mental health issues and suicidal behavior. [Social media can also] – LISTEN TO THIS – encourage unhealthy comparison with others.”<sup>xvii</sup>

You can imagine how this happens, right?

- Everyone else’s life looks great

- Everyone else's family and kids look perfect
- Everyone else is getting all this expensive stuff
- Everyone else is going on these fancy trips

Suddenly our stuff doesn't look as good:

- You were content w/ your home, car, job, spouse, friends – you name it – but then you saw your neighbor's BETTER home, car, job, spouse, friends, and suddenly yours doesn't look as good anymore.
- You're filled w/ covetousness and your contentment is gone

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And if it's not the people around us...

Then it's the advertisements around us!

- The television
- The radio
- Billboards when you're driving down the road
- Ads that fill your screen when you're on the Internet
- Fliers in your our mailbox

We're surrounded by ads.

Marketing 101 is this:

- Make people discontent.
- Make them feel miserable w/o whatever you're selling

So they want to buy whatever you're advertising so they can be happy.

We live in a culture that is very effective at producing covetousness in us. The constant hunger for more and more, for more and better, for new and improved, all work against real contentment.

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So the question is...

With so many things causing us to be discontent, how can we be content?

The answer brings us to Lesson 3...

### LESSON 3: CONTENTMENT COMES FROM GOD.

Listen to this...

Twice Paul said covetousness is idolatry:

- **Col 3:5 Put to death what is earthly in you** (then Paul a lists a number of sins): **sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and COVETOUSNESS, WHICH IS IDOLATRY.**
- **Eph 5:5 Everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or WHO IS COVETOUS (THAT IS, AN IDOLATER), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.**

If covetousness is idolatry, do you know what that means?

It means the Ten Commandments begin and end w/ the same commandment!

- The first commandment forbids idolatry
- The tenth commandment forbids covetousness...which is idolatry.

This is fitting b/c covetousness is a heart divided between two gods – the one true God and whatever we covet – so Paul calls it idolatry:

- We desire something more than we desire God
- We desire something so much we lose our contentment in God

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This is very problematic since contentment is a spiritual issue:

- It can't be found in anything physical
- Listen to this quote that captures the situation...

Jeremiah Burroughs said, *“My brethren, the reason why you have not got contentment in the things of the world is not because you have not got enough of them. That is not the reason. But the reason is because they are not things proportionable to that immortal soul of yours that is capable of God Himself. Many men think that when they are troubled and have not got contentment, it is because they have but a little in the world, and if they had more then they would be content. That is just as if a man were hungry, and to satisfy his craving stomach he should hold open his mouth to take in the wind, and then should think that the reason he is not satisfied is because he has not got enough of the wind. No, the reason is because the thing is not suitable to a craving stomach.”*

Since contentment is a spiritual issue, trying to find contentment through the physical is like trying to satisfy your appetite by consuming the wind...you can eat as much wind as you want, but you're still hungry. If we want to be content, we must approach it spiritually, versus physically.

Our hearts must be rooted in the spiritual and eternal...versus the temporary and physical

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When we pursue contentment through the physical, what we're really trying to do is fill a need in our lives:

- A need to be somebody, b/c when we have this then we'll feel good about ourselves
- A need to feel cared for, b/c when we have this it will give us the security we crave
- A need to have excitement in our lives, b/c when we have this it will give us the newness we desire

We covet these things – money, power, position, or possessions – but this is the deception:

- They can't satisfy us
- This is why people in the wealthiest nation in the world struggle w/ so much discontentment.

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Let me say it like this:

Contentment can't be obtained through trying hard enough or through any amount of human effort:



- It can't be obtained through any amount of possessions or wealth
- This doesn't mean possessions don't provide some degree of temporary contentment – they do – BUT, it doesn't last.

Lasting contentment only comes from God

- It can only be found in a relationship with Him, b/c He:
  - Created us...
  - Love us...
  - Knows what's best for us

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So what is the ultimate cause of discontentment?

It is our failure to pursue the Lord as our source of joy and meaning in life.

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Sometimes we talk about the most distinguishing traits of godly people:

- People who are humble
- People who are servants
- People who pray
- People who are joyful

These are wonderful qualities, but we could also add contentment to the list.

Contentment is one of the most distinguishing traits of godly people, b/c it's evidence of a heart resting in God...versus resting in possessions or wealth.

William Hendriksen said, *“The truly godly person is not interested in becoming rich. He possesses inner resources which furnish riches far beyond that which earth can offer.”*<sup>xviii</sup>

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Let me show you some verses supporting this.

Please turn to two books to the left to **2 Cor 3:5**.

**2 Cor 3:5 Not that we are sufficient (or content) in ourselves (in other words, we can't be content or sufficient on our own) to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency (or contentment) is FROM GOD.**

Sufficiency – or contentment – can only come **from God**.

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Turn to the right to **2 Cor 9:8**. Here's another verse making this point...

**2 Cor 9:8 God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency (there's a footnote that it also means “all contentment”) in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.**

Content and sufficient are synonymous, which is why they're translated w/ the same Greek word and used interchangeably.

The Greek word for **all sufficiency** is *autarkeia* (pr: ows-tark-eye-uh), which is translated **content** in:

- **1 Tim 6:6 Godliness with contentment (*autarkeia*) is great gain.**
- **Phil 4:11 I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content (*autarkeia*).**

It means self-sufficient: “*a perfect condition of life in which no aid or support is needed.*”

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Regarding the sufficiency – or contentment – God can give us, the universals – or “**alls**” – in this verse are staggering. It says **God is able to make:**

- **ALL grace abound to you**
- **Having ALL sufficiency**
- **In all things**
- **At all times**
- So we can **abound in EVERY good work.**

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Our resources are limited...

We have limited amounts of:

- Time
- Money
- Energy

But God isn't limited!

He has an infinite amount of **grace** so:

- He can dispense it lavishly
- He doesn't have to hold back

To put it simply: He has the grace for even the most discontent person to be content and sufficient.

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So here's a hard truth...

When we're NOT content:

- It's not God's fault
- It's not b/c He ran out of grace for us

It's b/c we have put on discontentment – often b/c we were coveting – versus putting on the contentment God offers us.

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Let me show you one more verse. Turn to **Heb 13:5**.

This might be the most important verse on this subject...

**Heb 13:5a Keep your life free from love of money (or covetousness), and be content with what you have,**

Pause here...

God basically said to put off covetousness and put on contentment!

This is pretty straightforward:

- Our lives should be **free from the love of money** or covetousness. We know that...we've been talking about this for a few weeks.
- We should **be content with what [we] have**. We know this too...as we've been talking about this today.

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Now how would we expect God to say we can do this?

We should:

- Despise money
- Never crave anything
- Hate the pleasures of this world

Nope.

Look what He says...

**Heb 13:5b** for (or because) **he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."**

In other words:

- We can put off covetousness
- We can put on contentment

Because of God's promise to never leave us or forsake us.

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The promise is threaded throughout the OT:

- God told Jacob when he had the dream of the angels ascending and descending on the ladder: **Gen 28:15 Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go...For I will not leave you."**
- God made this promise to Joshua:
  - In **Deut 31:6b It is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you."**
  - And again in **Josh 1:5b Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you.**
- David made this promise to Solomon when he became king: **1 Chr 28:20b Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed, for the Lord God, even my God, is with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.**

Then we see the promise in the NT:

- Jesus made this promise to the disciples before He left them: **Matt 28:20b Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.**
- The Lord made this promise to Paul in a vision: **Acts 18:10 I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you.**

So we see this promise throughout the OT, into the NT, and then made to us too.

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This promise is one of the most forceful in the NT in that it contains two double negatives:

1. **Never will I leave you**
2. **Never will I forsake you.**

It's similar to saying, "I will never, ever, ever leave you."

The Lord wants to make it overwhelmingly clear He will always be w/ us...and this reality should allow us to be content!

No amount of money or possessions can ever replace the beautiful truth that our God will never leave us or forsake us.

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But here's an important point...

This isn't about knowing...this is about believing:

- This isn't about having the head knowledge that God will never leave us or forsake us
- This is about truly believing God will never leave us or forsake us

When we embrace this promise, and it becomes the most important thing in our lives, we can be truly content.

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Let me close w/ this quote from Steve Swartz...

*"The best time to look for blessings is when you feel like your life is devoid of them. The enjoyment of God's pleasures is the outworking of genuine trust in Him. This demonstrates authentic contentment. It's the Lord's quiet, comforting way of informing you that He remains right here. He sits with you through the countless silent blessings He gives every single day."*

Let's pray.

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<sup>i</sup> White, The Cost of Commitment, pp. 70-71

<sup>ii</sup> <https://howmuch.net/articles/household-net-financial-wealth-around-the-world>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://fortune.com/2015/09/30/america-wealth-inequality/>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://povertyusa.org/facts>

<sup>v</sup> <https://poverty.ucdavis.edu/faq/what-current-poverty-rate-united-states>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/08/23/most-americans-vastly-underestimate-how-rich-they-are-compared-with-the-rest-of-the-world-does-it-matter/>

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- xvii <https://time.com/5609124/us-suicide-rate-increase/>
- xviii Bridges, p. 105 quoting William Hendriksen, Commentary on I & II Timothy and Titus, London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1959, p. 198.