

Which “Tent” Will You Live in? Luke 12:15, Hebrews 13:5

Luke 12:15 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁵ *But He said to them, “Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one is affluent does his life consist of his possessions.”*

Hebrews 13:5 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

⁵ *Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever abandon you,”*

Introduction

Fire in the House:

Imagine that your house is on fire, the people and the pets are out, and you have five minutes to go back and grab something in the house and get out; what would you save?

- Smart phones, important documents, jewelry, shoes, laptop computers, Bibles, stuffed animals, family albums, purses, pillows, diplomas, and so on.

Your answer reveals your priorities. This scenario forces us to think about the nature of possessions, doesn't it? We cannot take them with us. (E.g., Movie: **You Can't Take It With You** (1938) a comedy film directed by Frank Capra that won two Academy Awards: Best Picture and Best Director).

Nothing in this world is permanent. Our material possessions don't last forever, either. In fact, when we are gone, most of our stuff will be obsolete or wouldn't mean much to anyone else but to us. That's why I say “amen” to Jesus who declares, “Life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”

Content

The problem is this: we say that our lives do not consist in the abundance of possessions, yet our actions betray our words. We live and act as if they do, because most of us are, as Pastor Adam Hamilton puts, afflicted with **affluenza** and **credit-itis**. He also points out to another condition that afflicts our hearts: Restless Heart Syndrome (p. 55, “Enough,” Adam Hamilton).

Restless Heart Syndrome (RHS):

Have you heard of restless leg syndrome (RLS)? It is a medical condition that causes twitches and contractions in the legs. Restless Heart Syndrome works in a similar pattern, but instead of affecting our legs, it afflicts our hearts. Its main symptom? **Discontentment.** Afflicted with RHS, our hearts never become satisfied with anything: as soon as we get one thing, we hardly take time to enjoy it before we want something else. We are perpetually discontent. If left unchecked, RHS can destroy us.

I am not saying that every type of discontent is bad. On the contrary, there is a certain discontent that God intends us to keep or never depart from. We can call it godly/holy discontent. God has wired our hearts in a way that they would be discontent with certain things. For instance, James Mackintosh, the great Scottish philosopher of the nineteenth century, once said: *“It is right to be contented with what we have, but never with what we are”* (*ibid.*, p. 56). It is right for us *“to be discontent with our moral character, our spiritual life, our pursuit of holiness, our desire for justice, and our ability to love...”* (*ibid.*) because God wants us to grow and improve in these areas. However, it is never good for us to be discontent with our possessions.

Let me say again: with certain things, God calls us to be content and with other things, we are to be discontent. The problem is this: we tend to get them mixed up. We tend to be discontent with those things we are supposed to be content with **and** content with those things we are supposed to be discontent with!

Adam Hamilton:

Listen to what Pastor Hamilton says: *“The problem is that we tend to be content with our involvement in pursuing justice in the world. We tend to be content with our level of righteousness—sometimes being self-righteous. We tend to be content with how much we love others. We tend to be content with our relationship with God. We tend to be content with how often we read the Bible and pray. Generally, we are satisfied with those things that deserve more of our time and attention”* (*ibid.*). Hamilton continues,

“Likewise, those things we should be content with are the very things we find ourselves hopelessly discontented with. Most of us, for instance, experience discontentment with our stuff - our homes, cars, televisions, gadgets, clothes, and a whole host of other things” (*ibid.*)

Here are more examples:

- In the past twenty years, about 70% of the workforce in America is disengaged / discontented with their jobs

(https://www.gallup.com/workplace/468233/employee-engagement-needs-rebound-2023.aspx?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axioswhatsnext&stream=science)

- Many of us do the same thing when it comes to the church, our parents, our children, and even with our marriages.

The way we live our lives with discontentment is like this: if we say to God, *“I don’t like what you have given me, God, and I want something else. I want to trade it in and want something better than what you gave me”* (*ibid.*, p. 59).

Clearly, we struggle with discontentment. So, what can we do about it?

Four Suggestions for Contentment:

Hamilton suggests the following four ways to cultivate contentment in our lives.

It Could Be Worse (I.C.B.W.): whenever you find yourself discontented with something or someone, remind yourself that it could be worse. John Ortberg, the pastor at Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in California, makes an excellent suggestion as follows: *When you are getting into your five-year old car in the parking lot, say, “I.C.B.W.” As you walk into your house or apartment that is in desperate need of repairs, say, “I.C.B.W.” When you go to work and are faced with problems and difficulties and disappointments, say, “I.C.B.W.” When you are frustrated and disappointed with your spouse, say, “I.C.B.W.”* (*ibid.*, p. 60).

This practice helps us to look on the bright side or find the silver lining. This also helps us to recognize that even if we dislike, a thing, person, or circumstance, we can always find something good to focus on.

How Long Will This Make Me Happy? The second key to contentment is to ask yourself a simple question: **How long will this make me happy?** *“So often we buy something,”* Hamilton asserts, *“thinking it will make us happy, only to find that the happiness lasts about as long as it takes to open the box.”* (*ibid.*) E.g., Think of the Christmas toys to children. How long does their joy last? A week or less?

This practice is especially helpful in controlling the “urge” of buying something instantly. Wait 24 hours and see how much you can control your impulsive buying habits.

Cultivate a Grateful Heart. Cultivating gratitude in your heart is the third key to contentment. Gratitude is **essential** if you want to be content. Contentment will come to you when you spend more time giving thanks for what you already have than complaining

about what's missing or wrong in your life. Here's a fact: in any situation, we can either complain or be thankful. We humans are creatures of habit. Either we pick up the habit of complaining or we pick up the habit of being grateful. We can focus on all the things we don't like, or we can begin to search for the things we like and be grateful for them. We can stay focused on the disappointments in life, or we can give thanks for the blessings.

Now, listen carefully. Many people believe that we will be thankful when good things happen first. In reality, though, it works the other way around. In other words, when you are thankful first, good things will follow. Don't wait for good things to happen first to be grateful. Start being thankful today regardless your circumstances. Make it your habit, and then your feelings of gratitude will follow. Act first and feelings will follow. E.g., G. K. Chesterton writes, *"There is the great lesson of 'Beauty and the Beast'; that a thing must be loved before it is loveable"* (p. 50, *Orthodoxy*, G. K. Chesterton). Be determined to love first someone who is unlovable. Say "I love you," and do loving things for him/her. Eventually the unlovable will become lovable, and your loving feelings will follow. However, if you wait until that person becomes lovable before you start loving him/her, the moment may never come. E.g., A sister in Christ loved her "obnoxious husband" by posting Bible verses in every corner of the house. They are still married today. So, even when nothing seems go right in your life, start being thankful and praising God for His blessings. Over time your heart will change, and you will be grateful for what you have. Then, more things that you are grateful for will follow, and you can be content.

The fourth key to contentment is to ask yourself this question: **Where Does My Soul Find True Satisfaction?** The world lies to us and brainwashes us that happiness can be found in ease, luxury, comfort, and money. The Bible, however, answers the question quite differently. In every book, it declares that God alone is the source of our true satisfaction and contentment.

Jesus says, *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest"* (Matthew 11:28). The Psalmist said, *"O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you, my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you.../ My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods...."*(Psalm 63:1, 5-6).

Listen to St. Augustine's prayer: *"Thou hast created us for Thyself, and our heart is not quiet until it rests in Thee"* (<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/s/saintaugus385403.html#wDrUJagtWFKpRTI9.99>).

Blaise Pascal wrote: *"There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through*

Jesus.”

(<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/b/blaisepasc395508.html#tM5jyq6yQ7GjJ7Xg.99>).

Paul the Apostle confessed that all of his deepest needs were satisfied in his relationship with God through Christ. *“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. I can do everything through him who gives me strength”* (Philippians 4:12-13). He has found the secret to contentment. He found Christ to be his source, the One who satisfies his every need and enables him to be content in all circumstances. The writer of Hebrews echoes with Paul: *“Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for [Christ] has said, ‘I will never leave you or forsake you.’ So, we can say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid’”* (Hebrews 13:5-6).

Conclusion

One thing is for sure: without God, there’s no true contentment. The longings of our soul cannot be satisfied with material possessions or an abundance of wealth. True contentment begins with the understanding that Christ is the only source of satisfaction of our soul. You can be content knowing that Christ is by your side no matter what and He will see you through. With this assurance, you can face whatever each day may bring with contentment and joy. So, which “tent” will you live in? Discon‘tent’ or Con‘tent’? Choose today.

Let us pray.