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Presentation Transcript

Being Content

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I met a man once who had made enough money that he could meet all his physical needs and desires for the rest of his life. He no longer had to work. He no longer had any concerns about money or financial security. And yet, he was one of the most discontented people I've ever met – very unhappy. His situation was so remarkable that I did an entire series of presentations about his situation. It was called *Being Happy*. It's still available on our Website at liferesource.org.

You might notice that, after all these years, I'm still thinking about him and others in similar situations. And I have thought to add to the discussion in a new presentation called *Being Content*. I don't think we can be happy unless we are, for the most part, content, so let's dig into it. This isn't just some auxiliary sermon either. This is a big deal. Four of the Ten Commandments deal directly with covetousness. And when people are coveting, that's because they're not content in some way. So, it's important to get this right.

We might ask the question, "Content about what?" Well, let's think about that. What are you contented with? And what are you discontented about? How about your job? Or, maybe your boss? Or, maybe the people that work for you? Or, the income you receive? Or, the work skills you have? Or, the benefits package? Or, retirement? A lot of things involved in how we make a living. Where are the areas of contentment, and where are the areas of discontentment? What about your marriage, if you're married? And your mate? And, how about your children? And your parents, and your siblings? And, even the dog or cat? How about your house? Do like where it's located? Is it big enough? Is it stylish enough for you? Does it meet all your needs? What about the clothes you wear? Or, the car you drive, the food you eat, the vacations you take, the hobbies you have? What about your congregation? Are you content with that? And the members of it – how about that? Are you contented with them? What about your position in the congregation? Do you wish you had more authority, or more ways to serve? I mean, there are so many ways to think about church, right? And your relationship with God? Are you content with that? How about control? Some people always want more. Are you contented with the sphere of control – what you have in your life? What about the country you live in? If you're watching the news, there's a lot of people discontented with that right now in the United States. And what

about your race? Are you contented to be the race you are? How about your gender? Some people are having problems with that.

Looking at this list, we can quickly see that there are many things in life with which we're contented, but we could change it. And then there are some things that we can't. Also, there are some things we ought *not* be discontented about, because it would be bad for us to have those. Knowing the difference in all this would be immeasurably helpful, wouldn't it? We can figure it out. And once we can define which areas we can work in and which areas we can't – which ones would be helpful and which ones wouldn't – it makes life a lot easier.

Let's just talk about being content with what we have. Jesus was not big on spending energy on things. And Paul, having learned from Him – said, in Hebrews 13:5:

Hebrews 13:5 – *Keep your life free from the love of money and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."*

This is an interesting scripture. Paul says we should keep our lives free of the love of money, *because* God says He will never leave us nor forsake us. So what's the point he's making? Well, I did research for the series I mentioned earlier. One of the things that was demonstrated was, that once a person has enough money coming in to meet their basic needs, making more doesn't make them happier. Money's good to help us stay alive, to keep warm, to keep fed, to keep covered up, be educated – you know, fundamental things – but once we have those – a way to get to work – a car – but once we have those fundamentals, beyond that, the pursuit of money doesn't really do anything tangible that's good for us – for our mood or our well-being. So once again, psychological studies support biblical principles.

Here's another scripture where Jesus talks about this topic. It's in Matthew 6:19. He says:

Matthew 6:19 – *Do lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body, so if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then, the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! No one can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money at the same time.*

So what all this about the eye? If your eye is good, that means you're focused on the right things – Godly things. In the *Fiddler on the Roof*, Tevia asked God to bless him with only a small fortune – very funny, right? Tevia was a poor dairy man and he just wished he had more, so he only wanted a small fortune. But the answer to his question – in the show – the play – was, "You have enough." And he didn't get more, because he had enough. And when we go after stuff –

things, power, control, thicker carpet, better vacations, fancier clothes, nicer cars – when we do that to the exclusion of our spiritual lives, and the lives of our family, Jesus said we’re in the dark. We have not got our priorities straight. Because once we have the basics, we’re good. And He gets even more specific as He goes a long here in Matthew 6:25:

V-25-33 – *Therefore I tell you, “Don’t be anxious about your life – what you will eat or what you will drink – nor about your body – what you put on it. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”* Well, some people don’t seem to think it is, but Jesus did not have that opinion. He said: *“Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles – that is, the unconverted people – seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you.”* So God will take care of us.

I heard a young man talking to a group of teens once at summer camp, and he quoted that scripture – *seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all this will be added to you* – and he told them that, when he was in college, one day he realized he was all taken up with his education, and making a living, and finding a wife, and all those other physical things that people that age are interested in. And he said that, while was studying his Bible one day, that scripture just jumped out at him, and he realized that he had put all the physical things ahead of God, instead of God ahead of all the physical things. So he decided he would reverse that order and focus on what God considered important. And he pointed out that that had been just a few years ago – when he was in college – and yet now, as he was speaking to them, he was happily married, he had a great job, he was educated and prepared to face his life in every area – with God, with His employer, with his wife, and his soon-to-be-born son. It was just like God promised. If you put Him first, He will take care of you.

So, if we put God first, and believe He will take care of us, we can X off most of the things that we’re disgruntled about – or discontented about – off the list right away. It’s as simple as that. Well, it really isn’t, but it should be.

What else can we be discontented about? Well, watching the news and the Internet, it’s easy to be discontented with the way things are going in our country right now. While we were contented about the way it was going, other people were discontented, so it’s a question. I want to ask you this, though: Have you ever wondered why Jesus came when He did? He chose to enter into human history during one of the most repressive regimes ever. And in the locale where they were

working... in the Bible the Roman Empire was likened to a predatory beast. Taxes were oppressively high. People starved to death and lost their land because of the taxation. And punishments were extreme. People lost their children who were sold into slavery to pay their debt – tax debts. We know that Jesus was crucified and there were two common thieves beside Him, so terrible punishments. If you were in the Roman system, you were a conquered nation, and you, as a citizen of it, were pretty a slave, because of the financial burdens – plenty to be discontented about. So what did Jesus say to do about that? Well, He said in Matthew 5:40:

Matthew 5:40-41 – *If anyone should sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go with him one mile, go with him two.*

So, in those days, a Roman soldier could require you to deliver the mail, or help him do it. They could also – and He was talking about being sued over such things – ask for a person’s clothing, or food, or housing, and the law said that people could not resist that. They could be killed – and killed in a heinous way – if they didn’t give the soldiers what they needed to do their jobs. So Jesus’ position was to avoid death or slavery by just going along with the system. His view on it is, “It’s only a temporary system anyway.” In the end, Jesus is going to fix all of that.

He also said in Matthew 5:25:

V-25-26 – *Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.* No matter whether it just or unjust, do not be discontented with injustice. Be pragmatic. Suffer injustice to avoid more trouble. Try to fly under the radar and just be.

In Luke 20:21, it says:

Luke 20:21-25 – *So they asked Him, “Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful for us to pay tribute to Caesar or not?” But He perceived their craftiness – they were trying to get Him to say they didn’t need to pay taxes to Caesar and then they could get Him in trouble with the government. But He perceived their craftiness, and said to them, “Show me a denarius.” So you can see someone pulling one out. “Whose likeness and inscription does it have?” They said, “Caesar’s.” He said to them, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”*

So I heard a new tax package was just rolled out. Is it oppressive? Some people think it’s not even legal that the government taxes income. Jesus would said, “Just pay it. Slide around in prison with the money God gives you? Don’t risk it.” Do you see all the people that are rioting – or have been rioting – prior to the election? Those are some really unhappy discontented people.

They didn't like the way things were going in the government. Jesus said, "Don't worry about that stuff." He's going to take care of it later. Just find a way to get along the best you can.

Jesus really doesn't care that much about whether we have a swimming pool, or we don't, because of high taxes. He just wants us to get along. He's going to take care of all that later. Instead of breaking commitments, try to work through difficulties. If you sign a contract, keep it. Or, if you get married, stay that way.

I talked to a man once who was discontented with his wife. I asked, "Why discontented?" And he said, "I can do better." So, his own inflated opinion of himself was making him discontented with his wife. He thought he could do better – he deserved better. Of course, he chose her and now he needs to make it work, because he promised he would. So, whether it's legal, or social, or marital, if you make a promise, you keep it. If he spent as much energy working on getting along with his wife as he did feeling sorry for himself, he would probably have been okay. Now, in his defense, once we got him and his wife together, and they started talking about the issues, his attitude began to change. And guess what? He became a happier person, once he decided to work on the marriage, instead of scuttling it.

There's something else that needs to be discussed here that is not often thought about. Anxiety, quite often, kills contentment.

I heard once of a man who had a very fine home. He built this home with a large vault under it, filled with food – more food than he would ever need. That didn't make sense to me until I learned that he had been a prisoner of war in Vietnam and had almost starved to death. He was going to make sure he had enough food that that would never happen to him again. Now, I'm not saying that I would have done any differently, either, had I survived that kind of terror, but I mention it to draw your attention to the connection between need – or perceived need – and anxiety.

Anxiety can cause us to become discontented. Jesus acknowledge that, didn't He? Remember, anxiety is the participation of bad things happening in the future – most likely because they have happened in the past. So the Bible position is to be as ready as we can – you know, don't tempt God. Have enough food on hand that you can survive an electrical breakdown, or water shortages, or whatever. Then trust God to take care of you beyond that. No one asks for bad things to happen to them either, nor for the ensuing anxiety. But if it is with us – if we're found with it – the Bible injunction is to let our hearts rejoice in God's care for us. For some people, that's very difficult. I'm aware of that. And, as a therapist, I can also attest to the fact that anxiety, many times, can be reduced by confronting past events in a helpful way.

Another thing that gets in a lot of people's way is entitlement. This is true because, when a person believes they are entitled to something without working for it, it contradicts the nature of the universe.

This is sort of an aside, but I've noticed every time I bring up this subject – the subject of entitlement, which I've done frequently lately – a number of people drop off my mailing list. There's a flurry of them. I think the reason this happens is because young adults are extremely sensitive to being labeled as entitled. So we're here talking about it, and they quickly unsubscribe. Why is that? Well, I think people in my generation criticize them a lot for that and they're tired of hearing it – probably only need to hear it but once. But from my working with a cross section of the population – from old age, all the way back to teenage – it doesn't seem to me that young adults have a lock on that problem any more than those of us who are older. There are people in all age groups who suffer from this lack of acceptance of reality.

If we look at the list that we created at the beginning of the presentation, please notice that most of things on this list we can change, if we want to – if we're willing to work hard enough – or make changes in the way we think, or the way we spend our time. I mean, that being the case, then, to just feel like you deserve it without any work puts you in a situation where you're not going to have the things you want.

A middle-aged woman came to me one time, and complained bitterly about her ex-husband. “He was not physically abusive, but he was not really that good of provider,” she said. And she went on and on complaining about him, and how unfair her life was, and why didn't God protect her from that. When I suggested that she had a part to play in the issue, because she was the one that selected him, she got up and left. She was entitled to make a wrong choice and not suffer the consequences for it. But there *are* consequences in life. That *is* life. Everything we do, there's a consequence to it, whether it's bad.... If we're not careful about major decisions, it's easy to make a mistake. And, as long as we blame God or somebody else for our mistake, we're never going to learn the lesson we need to learn and go forward. And with this woman, as long as she continues to disconnect her choices from the consequences of them, she's going to remain discontented. And that goes for people that think they deserve things that they didn't earn. They're not going to get what they really want out of life in the long run.

Why do you suppose that we have so many different groups, even within our small Church of God faith? Let's look in 1 Timothy 6:3. Here's another really interesting scripture.

1 Timothy 6:3-5 – *If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth – boy! That's a statement for you!*

Have you ever met people who always seem to be in the middle of drama? I heard a story recently about a man who went to a Church of God congregation, and he complained to other

people in the congregation about the pastor and he gathered a following. Then he contacted the church organization headquarters and complained bitterly about his pastor. Someone came out from the headquarters to assess the situation, and after taking in all the information, they suggested the minister resign, which he did. Now once this man got his pastor fired, he quit the congregation and joined another COG group. So what do we think he will do there? There's another reason we have so much fracturing. And beside that, people like to be in the middle of controversy. But there's another one.

The next thing Paul said was that these people that these people that are depraved and without God:

V-5 - *...imagine that godliness is a means of gain. Sometimes the drama is to gain control or gain a following. And there is money in religion. So some people covet it. And gullible people can't see that, but it's there, and they follow along.*

Paul continues with a very important verse now – verse 6:

V-6-10 – *But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But, if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. And it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows – get in all kinds of problems – get in way too deep.*

So when we have a relationship with and follow Jesus Christ and are content with what He's given us, that's about as good as it's going to get. This life is not supposed to be a millennial paradise. If we can have a relationship with God and follow Christ and are content with what He's gives us, that's about it. Let's look in Philippians 4:11 – Paul said:

Philippians 4:11-13 – *Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. Oh, well, if whatever situation he's in, to be content, he's always content. He said: I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

Paul says the secret of being content can be found in Jesus Christ. The scriptures we covered today and many more explain how to do that.

Something else that we need to think about here: Matthew 7:7.

Matthew 7:7-11 – *Ask and it will be given you. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be*

opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives, and the one who seeks, finds, and to the one who knocks, it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

Jesus was talking about finding God, but He wasn't just talking about that. He was speaking about a universal principle that works in every arena of life. If we want a compatible mate, and take the time to really seek for that person – get-to-know perspective – and look for the best one and understand ourselves, and know what we would need, then that's how that happens. But, if you just marry somebody because you think they're going to be a good provider, and don't think about anything else, then you get what you deserve.

I was watching a fascinating documentary recently about the Nez Perce Indian tribe. They were known for their horsemanship. That was sort of their identity of the plains people. But when they lost the war of 1887 with the US Army, all their horses were taken away from them. This documentary was about one Native-American man living on the reservation there in Wyoming – or maybe it was Idaho – who had the vision of restoring their ability to work with and have quality horses. And he was working with their kids, getting them involved in it – teaching them to ride and they had a breeding program going where they were trying to get back the kind of horses they used to have. He was just totally single-minded about this whole thing. And it was proving very successful. They sold some of the horses they had bred for \$12,000 a piece. They interviewed one of the tribal fathers who had been watching all this taking place over time. So this Native-American tribal father, he'd been watching this thing go on, gaining steam, getting ready to really break out, and he made the comment: "If you really want something, and you can't find it, just keep looking for it." And this man who was working with the horses and the kids and the tribe was an example of that kind of searching. Besides searching, there was a *huge* amount of effort being funneled toward that activity. He knew that, if he was going to find it, he was going to be part of building it.

Searching is hard work. You've got to knock. And you've got to seek. Think about the twelve disciples. They had been given instructions by Christ to go out into the world, preach the gospel and make disciples. And they knew their job was to build the church and that that work that they were going to do was going to last until Christ returned. They all went out all over the world to do the work of God, seeking disciples. We know the most about Paul from his letters. We know that *terrible* things happened to that man – terrible things. But he never stopped seeking disciples and seeking to preach the gospel to people that hadn't heard it yet – and also seeking eternal life, for that matter. And what was the end result? Well, he said he learned to be content with whatever state he was in. He had his eye firmly fixed on Christ and was seeking Him. And he had it all – contentment with godliness.

So, to sum it up today, when we're disconnected, we have to put our attention on something

more important. Let's read 1 Peter 1:3. This is what we need to focus on.

1 Peter 1:3-9 – *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith – the salvation of your souls.*

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Until next time, this is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.