

## Keys to Contentment

1 Timothy 6:6

“Yet true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth.”

**Have you ever really wanted something?** I mean wanted something so badly that you could taste it, so bad that you thought your life would be empty and meaningless until you got it. Maybe it was a certain toy growing up, or a certain kind of car, or a relationship, maybe even a motorcycle. **As you looked at the object of your desire, you realized that you would never rest until you had it.** Have you ever felt that way?

**Have you ever had the experience of finally getting what you had wanted for so long?** At first it feels so good, but gradually the newness starts to wear off. Pretty soon we start seeing imperfections in what we once thought was perfect. **If it's a toy, it breaks the day after Christmas.** If it's a car, it breaks down, and the warranty doesn't cover the repairs. If it's a relationship, we gradually start seeing that person's character flaws and idiosyncrasies. Soon we realize that having whatever it was that we could not live without isn't all we thought it would be.

**And many of you know exactly what I am talking about don't you?** Dissatisfaction with what we have is an American epidemic. Perhaps it's an epidemic we are susceptible to because we live in the most affluent society in the history of the human race. **Dissatisfaction is an epidemic that is carefully fed by the advertising industry, as it promises us again and again that our dissatisfaction will disappear if we just buy this or that product.** We all know those advertising promises aren't really true, but something deep inside our soul cries out, "Maybe this will make my restlessness go away." Dissatisfaction is what leads husbands to leave their wives after fifteen years of marriage; it's what tempts people to max out their credit cards to buy new clothes.

**This restlessness inside of each of us is especially strong at Christmas.** I read an editorial in Newsweek a few weeks ago that made this exact same point. The author of the editorial Anna Quindlen pointed out that our nation has more malls than it has high schools, that we as Americans spend more time shopping than we do reading. She then concludes, "The holidays should be a time to honor our best values, not a time to muffle them in layers of stuff."

**Muffled in layers of stuff...what a graphic description of American life today.** Perhaps this is one reason why so many people get depressed during the holidays and why marriages start showing the signs of strain and stress. So as we come to the last of our studies in 1 Timothy, I want to talk to you about the keys to contentment.

**Lets begin with your dissatisfaction with your job.** Look at verses 1-2, "All slaves should show full respect for their masters so they will not bring shame on the name of God and his teaching. If the masters are believers, that is no excuse for being disrespectful. Those slaves should work all the harder because their efforts are helping other believers who are well loved." According to a recent Gallup poll, that describes about one out of five working Americans. You know you're dissatisfied with your job when you feel exhausted after every single day, when you find new work assignments frustrating, when you find yourself taking longer and longer breaks. You find yourself regularly checking the want ads and updating your resume.

**The verses we are going to look at first deal with the relationship between slaves and masters.** At first it's hard to see how a passage from the Bible dealing with slaves and masters is relevant to our jobs, so let me talk about that for a minute. In the Roman Empire when the New Testament was written, one-third of the people in the Roman workforce were slaves. **You see, slavery in the ancient world wasn't based on race like it was in our nation's history.** Instead, most people went into slavery for mostly economic reasons, because they couldn't pay their debts. For most slaves, slavery was

temporary, just until the person could pay off their bills. Some people liked the security of slavery and simply choose to spend their entire lives as slaves. Some people became slaves to advance their social standing because you could get an education as a slave that you often couldn't afford on your own. Upon release, an emancipated slave could advance in Roman society, even becoming a Roman senator.

Now the Bible never condones slavery, but it also doesn't condemn slavery. Instead, the Bible assumes that slavery will be a reality in most societies, and so it regulates slavery to make it more humane. The Old Testament law made provision for the emancipation of slaves after seven years of slavery. So the Bible assumes that slavery is a part of the sinful world, and it tries to regulate it, to make it more humane.

Slaves occupied the very bottom level of the workforce. Slaves truly worked dead end jobs, and even though slavery was often temporary, slaves were at the bottom of the ladder economically. So I don't think it's a leap to apply the principles between slaves and masters to people in their jobs, even though our jobs are voluntary.

Now with that said, look at verses 1-2, "Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed. And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved." Two situations are envisioned in these two verses.

The first is a Christian slave who works for a non-Christian. Continuing the theme of "honor" from chapter 5, Paul tells Christian slaves to treat their non-Christian masters as worthy of full respect, or honor. The reason for this command is to prevent God's reputation from being dragged through the mud by the slave. Paul is thinking about the salvation of the slave owner, that its possible that

the Christian slave is the only Christian close enough to the slave owner to share the good news of Jesus with him.

The second situation envisioned in these two verses is a Christian slave who works for a Christian. Because the slave-master distinction was broken down in the Christian church, it was entirely possible for a master to attend a church where one of his or her slaves was a leader. You see, in worship, when the church met, there was no distinction between slaves and free people. Perhaps this was leading some Christian slaves to stop working as hard for their Christian masters. Perhaps they were getting lazy or showing disrespect, perhaps expecting special treatment. So Paul urges them to work all the harder, because their service will benefit a fellow believer in Jesus.

So here we find the key to dealing with dissatisfaction with our job. Contentment can be found in viewing your work as service to God.

How do you see your job? Every Monday millions of followers of Jesus Christ go to work without ever giving the slightest thought to what God thinks about what they do. Most of us will spend more time working than doing anything else in our lives. Don't you think God is concerned about what we do with all that time and energy? Don't you think God cares about selling insurance or repairing cars? Don't you think God is interested in computer networks, building houses, and making movies? Most Christians have never even asked the question.

You see, most Christians view their jobs as a necessary evil. They see their job as a kind of toil that they must experience so they can do the things they really want to do. Things like spend time with their family, go to the beach for the weekend, going on cruises, and so forth.

**But God created us to work; labor is a part of God's intention for us.** The entrance of sin into our world made work more of a burden, but work in itself is not a result of sin. In the book of Genesis, Adam was told to take care of the garden long before sin entered into the equation. There are over 230 different occupations mentioned in the Bible because God cares about our labor.

**Are you dissatisfied with your job?** Maybe the job isn't the problem. Maybe you haven't yet learned to view your job as service to God.

**Next, lets look at your dissatisfaction with your faith.** Look at verses 3-5, "If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself."

**What I'm thinking of here are genuine Christians who have grown dissatisfied with his or her Christian faith.** I see this especially with people raised in Christian homes, people who've heard all the Bible stories since they were preschoolers. They've heard dozens of sermons on every Christian theme. For many of these people, familiarity has bred contempt.

**When you're dissatisfied with your faith, you become especially vulnerable to false ideas about God.** If you feel as if your faith stale, the idea that someone might have something new and fresh to say about God can be very alluring. This is why it's said that the cults are the unpaid bills of the church. You see non-Christian cults are especially attractive to a person who was raised in a Christian home but who's grown dissatisfied with his or her faith.

In verses 3-5 false doctrines are contrasted with "sound instruction" and "godly teaching." The Greek word translated "sound" here is a medical word that means "healthy," and it refers to anything that promotes health and wellness, in this case *spiritual health*. So sound instruction promotes spiritual health in our lives.

The phrase "godly teaching" here refers to teachings about how to be a godly person. So "godly teaching" is teaching that instructs us in how to live a God-centered life. In other words, contentment in our faith is accomplished by cultivating accurate beliefs and spiritual practices.

The last thing that Paul deals with here is dissatisfaction with our income. Look at verses 6-10, "Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

Dissatisfaction with our income is perhaps where we struggle the most when it comes to discontentment. Why? Because we use money as the instrument to measure our self-worth. And we also use money as a cause to be critical of others. For example, if we feel that we are carrying a greater workload than someone else who is making a greater salary than we are, we often become critical of that person's work ethics. So money is a great cause of discontentment.

Therefore, Paul reminds us that all of us have an appointment with death. And when death does come, we can't take our money or our possessions with us. We enter into the world broke, completely dependent on the generosity of our parents. In our lives we accumulate lots of stuff, make some money, and have a family, but when we leave, we leave alone. None of our possessions go with us.

**Did you hear the story about the man of great wealth wanting to take his money with him when he died?** He became very sick, so he told his wife to get all his money together, put it in a sack, and then hang the sack from the rafters in the attic. He said, "When my spirit is caught up to heaven, I'll grab the sack on my way." **Well he eventually died, and the woman raced to the attic, only to find the money still there.** She said, "I knew I should've put the sack in the basement."

Paul is simply telling us that we find contentment with our level of income by focusing on what's most important.

**Tonight, we have look at just some of the keys to contentment.** But like any key, these keys do us no good unless we use them to unlock God's promised contentment. This is why so many Christians are dissatisfied with their *jobs*, with their *faith*, and with their *income*, because they've been given these keys, but they haven't used them. **We unlock contentment by deciding to view our work as service to God, by deciding to cultivate our soul with accurate beliefs and spiritual practices, and finally by deciding to focus on what's really important in life.** Will you do that tonight?