

Are You Content?

10 Ways to a Better Life series

by Chris Famisaran

Good morning, everybody. How are you all doing? Are you content? Let's pray. God, we thank You for another Sabbath that we gather together, Lord, and as we close out our series of *10 Ways to a Better Life*, be with us now. In Jesus' name, Amen.

There once was a stonecutter who lived in a hut. He didn't have much, but he had enough. Over the many years, he had acquired the skills to become an excellent stonecutter. And yet, one day, as he was cutting a stone, he heard a shout—he heard praise. What could it be about? A king?

Dressed in royal garb, silk was passing through, and everyone clamored around the king. The stonecutter thought, “Ha. Oh, to have the power and all of the thrall. I wish I could be a king.”

And in an instant, he was a king. He roamed the lands. He gave instructions, he gave decrees, he gave orders. And as he did so, he realized that all the effects that he could see were not good. In fact, sometimes his decisions came to bad conclusions.

And as he was going out, however, he could see the weariness of the people. He then saw the sun, and how amazing would it be to be the sun? And he became the sun. He looked over all of the land, shining the rays of sunlight. It was good to be powerful, so he thought, until he could see the weariness and the tiredness of the people. And then one day, a cloud got in the way. What? How could it be? The sun could not shine directly through the cloud. And he thought, “Is the cloud more powerful than the sun? I would like to be a cloud.” And so he became a cloud. And there, he was able to provide shade and cover to the weary people who desired relief. He gave water through the rain. Rivers overflowed. There was an abundance of water. The land became green. The people were happy. There was no drought.

Until he saw a stone. The stone could not be moved despite the flow of the water in the river. No matter how hard the water traveled, the stone remained unmoved. And he thought, “You know what? I would like to be a stone.” And all of a sudden, he became a stone—unmovable, strong, dependent. Until he then saw a stonecutter across the river, chiseling, taking care and shaping something—a piece of rock, a piece of stone—into something wonderful. And then he realized, “I would like to be a stonecutter.” And from there, he became content.

How many of us find ourselves trying to chase something, hoping that it would fulfill our desires to be great, to be wonderful, to have much, only to find that maybe—just maybe—what we had before was not just good enough? It was great.

I've been pondering this week: what does it mean to truly, truly be content? As I look back and I reflect, what's most important? Is it attaining stuff? Or maybe memories? Or maybe both? I've wondered, what is the secret to being content?

Today, I want to look at our last commandment in a series that we've been going through. Maybe if you're joining us for the first time, over the last 10 weeks we've been going through the 10 Commandments—or, as we like to say, *10 Ways to a Better Life*.

And I'd like to go to our last commandment. Let's go to Exodus 20, verse 17. There's also a secondary passage in Deuteronomy 5:21 that later on the people had to be reminded of. But let's go to Exodus 20:17.

All right, and here it says: “You shall not”—what?—“shall not covet your”—what?—“your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

If you go to Deuteronomy 5:21, it also says, “Don't covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not set your desire on your neighbor's house or land,”—that was

added—“his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

What is God trying to tell the people? Because remember, He's preparing the Israelites to be His people. In the previous chapter He called them, “I want you to be a priesthood of believers. I want you to go out. I want you to share the good message that I have for the world—to invite people. I want you to be My representatives.” And here, the last lesson that He wants to share with them is this: don't covet your neighbor's stuff.

And prior to the last couple of commandments, there was actually a punishment associated—it was focusing on the external. And here, when it talks about coveting, it's something that is internal. Ultimately, what motivates us?

And here we are confronted with—and revealing God's character—is that God's looking at your heart, not just your behavior. What externally happens—what you say, what you do, how you act—God is deeply concerned for what is on your heart.

We know Matthew, Mark, and Luke share this commandment: the greatest commandment is to love your God with what? All your heart, all your soul, all your mind, all your strength—and to love your neighbor as what? Yourself. Do you love to beat yourself up? No.

But how often are we our harshest critic? Maybe when we've messed something up that you've done, you become embarrassed. Ultimately, what motivates us? How do we treat our fellow neighbor, our loved ones, our coworkers, our friends?

And if you look at the 10 commandments, you realize actually that the first and tenth commandments serve as bookends to all 10. The first being that you love God with everything. There is only God. Our allegiance is to God first and foremost—everything that sets the foundation.

But the last commandment also reflects: what are our actions, our thoughts, and our desires underpinned by? What are the motives of our hearts and our mind?

If you love your fellow neighbor, what motives do you have? As you love your parents and honor your elders, is there any hidden agenda, or do you truly love them for who they are?

Obviously, you don't want to murder somebody to gain something, because that's going to cause a whole bunch of issues. Don't covet your neighbor's spouse—be committed to your person. Obviously, don't take what is not yours, because it's not yours. Ultimately, as Bill talked about, God will provide. Amen.

Speak the truth. Do not slander. And the last thing here—the last lesson that God wants to instill among the people—is: don't worry. Be content. I want to go to another passage as well—a parable of Jesus. I want to go to the book of Luke, the Gospel of Luke. I want to go to Luke 12. Specifically, I also want to go to Luke 12:13. And we're going to talk about the parable of the rich fool. All right, Luke 12:13. Are we there? All right, verse 13.

“Someone in the crowd said to Him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.’”

We're starting out really hot there, right? “God, I want You to do this for me.” Sound familiar?

And then Jesus responds, “Man, who appointed Me a judge or an arbiter between you?” Then He said to them, “Watch out. Be on your guard against all kinds of greed. Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”

Life is not defined by the stuff that we own.

But imagine the audacity of somebody coming up to Jesus and saying, “Jesus, You need to fix something for me—to make it right. This is unfair. Tell my brother to give me my stuff.”

So then He continues, verse 16, and He told them a parable:

“The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. And he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ Then he said, ‘This is what I will do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I’ll say to myself, you have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy. Eat, drink, and be merry.’”
What is something that's repetitive here? The use of “I” or “I’ll.” “I’ll do this. I will be rich. I will be content. I will be able to drink, eat, be merry, do whatever I want.”

And maybe at first glance, many of us think that would be amazing—no responsibilities, no worries. But would you be content?

Verse 20: “But God said to him, ‘You fool. This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you prepared for yourself? This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves, but not rich toward God. Tim Keller once wrote, or said, “If you build your identity on things that death can take away, you’ll lose everything.”

And so I guess the question for all of us is: What are you building towards? What are you focusing on? Are you building on a life of just trying to attain stuff? Or maybe not just stuff—maybe you're trying to work for a certain position that you hope will bring satisfaction and completeness. But the reality is, it's just a position.

You know what comes along with bigger positions? More problems, more stress, more time away, maybe more money. But that's why they pay people more money—to deal with all of the problems, all of the stress, and all of the difficulties.

What are you building towards? Everything that we have can easily be taken away. And here we see that wealth again—it gives us a false sense of security. Later on, Jesus talks about how not to worry about your physical needs, to trust in God's ability to provide, and ultimately to prioritize the kingdom of God.

How is it possible? How can you be generous? Marshall Shelley wrote an article in *Leadership Weekly* a number of years ago. He writes, “My wife's father is a Kansas farmer. He spent all of his lifetime raising wheat, corn, Milo, beef, and along the way some chicken and sheep.”

And one day, as he was following him around the farm, he talked about the differences between living in the city and living a more rural agricultural lifestyle. His father-in-law said, “Most city folks I know expect each year to be better than the last. They think it's normal to get a raise, to earn more this year than you did last year. As a farmer, I have good years and bad years. It all depends on the rain at the right time, dry days for harvest, and no damaging storms. Some years we have more, some years we have less.”

It is one of those indelible moments of stunning clarity, and that law of the harvest—some years being fat, others lean—sound familiar? This story applies to much more than agriculture.

Growing in spiritual maturity means gratefully accepting the seasons of more and the seasons of less that God weaves into specific areas of our lives—our friendships, our marriages, our career, finance, ministry, and spiritual growth. There are going to be times where you may have plenty, and sometimes there may be less. And it may not even be just related to finances. There may be challenges that you experience. There may be good seasons—you may get a job promotion, you may achieve some success. But don't let it get to your head.

Because ultimately, what are we? We are all children of God. We're all called to be disciples of God. And I'm not saying that you should not get rich, or that you should not get wealthy. There's plenty of people in the Bible who were well-to-do. But what did they do with that wealth? Did they serve themselves? And if they did, how did that end up for them? I do think that God blesses people so that they can also be a blessing to others. But are we content?

One of the real treasures that I think we can find is this: wealth gives us a false sense of security. But also, real treasure is following God and serving others. Real treasure is following God and serving others.

One of the lessons that I've experienced and learned over the years is this: a desire to serve and make a difference in people's lives. How are you making a difference in people's lives around you—your spouse, your loved ones, your kids, your neighbors, your coworkers? Are you being a positive influence for them, or are you trying to manipulate the situation for your benefit? Have you ever worked for an insecure boss? Have you ever worked for somebody who just feels like a real, controlling taskmaster? And you know that everything you're trying to accomplish is actually for that person—hopefully to maybe, in their eyes, get a promotion or the better job. And everybody knows you can sniff that out from a mile away. Amen.

There's a difference. I was recently listening to a podcast, and there was a question presented to the individuals on the podcast. It led with: “How do I manipulate my people to be able to do good?” And this person didn't have a bad bone in them, but the choice of words could have been different.

And the podcast host said, “Let's reframe that. Instead of manipulating, how can I influence my team to win, to complete the task?” Now, this was just a job study, but we can apply this to life. As you deal with family and all those around you, what are the motives of your heart?

Are you trying to control the system for what you want and desire? Or are you positively influencing those around you to do what God has called you to do, and ultimately lead in the way God wants you to succeed?

All things in life start with trusting in God. People know where you're coming from, because it's not hard to sniff people's motives out. Amen. So, where are you leading from? Are you leading with sincerity and humility?

Over the years, as well, I've observed—talking about being content—I've been able to acquire stuff, and usually it's stuff that helps me have better experiences, like guitars and bikes. Did I want to be rich when I was younger? But as I get older, I realize: more money, more problems.

You can pull your phone out, you can get on an app, and you see comparisons. People saying, “If you do this, you'll have that.” I wonder,

though, are those influencers really happy, or are they truly being truthful? Or is it all fluff?

If you run after things that men or women profess, but don't seek the wisdom of God, you're probably going to go down a very challenging road. Not to say that following God is easy—because sometimes even being faithful to God can also be challenging. But when we put our trust, love, respect, and honor in God with everything, God will take care of us.

We can find contentment. We can find contentment and blessings in following what Jesus taught us. You want to live a good life? Treat other people well. Jesus shared how we can do that. You want to live a miserable life? Treat people very unwell, and you'll get all kinds of challenges. Be content with what you have.

So, what are the activities and things that you are building, especially in your family? I look back now at some of the things I remember with memories of Leisa. And I've shared this before: sometimes it's as simple as just getting ice cream. When we first got married, in our first year of marriage, I remember going to Baskin Robbins on a Thursday afternoon—the one in Redlands on State Street. And even going back a couple of years ago, we were on vacation and walked a couple of miles because it was a Wednesday night and there was like “two scoops for one.” Those kinds of memories are the things that I treasure the most—not buying or getting stuff, but helping build that foundation and relationship of trust. Doing something fun, doing something simple, spending a couple dollars on ice cream—those are the things I truly value. Building memories far outweighs buying stuff.

And in the end, you can't take your stuff to heaven. It's going to rot, it's going to rust, it's going to fall apart. But your memories are forever. Amen. So be content.

Reflection: Where do you find yourself believing that someone else has it better? Just because somebody looks like they have an amazing life doesn't necessarily mean that they do.

This week, I want to challenge you: when you catch yourself comparing, name it. Feel it. Experience it. Give it to God. And I want you to replace it with gratitude. Just thank God for something you are grateful for—even if it's something as simple as, “Thank You, Lord, I’m above ground and I’m breathing.”

Something as simple as, “Lord, thank You for air conditioning—it was hot.”
Something as simple as, “Thank You for the water,” even if it’s warm, lukewarm water—it’s still water.

Thank You for the fact that I have problems here in America, because our life is a dream life to the majority of people outside this country. Thank You that I have a toilet that works and I don’t have to go outside. Thank You that I have a faucet that spews water and I don’t have to walk down to the river. Thank You for my family. Thank You for my friendships.

We are in an interesting, challenging time, but I pray and encourage you: don't look to the chaos. Be content. I hope and pray that over the last 10 weeks, as we have been talking about the 10 Commandments, you will take these lessons and not see them as a burden, but as an opportunity to experience God, to love better, and to find freedom. Amen.

So may God bless you, and may you live with gratitude. Be content. Jesus, You’ve done so much for us, Lord. Help us to trust and not forget all the good that You’re doing in our lives. Lead and guide us. Help us to be content. This is our prayer. In Jesus’ name, everybody said, Amen.

Grace and peace.