

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*Contentment in Light of Eternity.*"

On Sunday mornings we were in a series on covetousness. We talked a lot about the problem – covetousness – and last week we started talking about the solution: contentment:

- If we want victory over a sin, it's not enough to simply stop that sin, we must also start something else.
- This is known as the principle of putting off and putting on.

If we want to put off covetousness, we must also put on contentment.

This morning we're going to begin looking at one of the two main NT passages discussing contentment, and that's **1 Tim 6:6-10**.

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Take a look w/ me at **verse 6**...

**1 Tim 6:6 But godliness with contentment is great gain,**

**Godliness** means being like God, or having God's character in our lives.

Let me first be clear about what Paul is NOT saying...

He's not saying we can have godliness without contentment...and this brings us to the first part of Lesson 1...

### **LESSON 1: WE CAN'T HAVE (PART I) GODLINESS WITHOUT CONTENTMENT.**

It almost looks like Paul is saying we can have **godliness without contentment**. As though perhaps godliness without contentment would simply be LITTLE gain versus the great gain of having both.

That's not what he's saying:

- He's making the statement that it's a wonderful blessing to have both **godliness with contentment**.
- That's the ideal combo that results in **great gain**.

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So why can't we have godliness without contentment?

Just picture what it would look like a for a godly person to be discontent...

You'd have people w/ God's characteristics, but:

- They're miserable...
- They're always complaining...and murmuring...and grumbling.

Basically, godly people w/o contentment would look like...ungodly people.

If you want a biblical example, I would say think about Israel in the wilderness:

- They were God’s people...so they were supposed to be godly.
- But they were constantly complaining...and it made them look ungodly.

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You can’t have **godliness [without] contentment**, b/c the [**godly**] person is a **content** person:

- This world is not his home
- He’s not living for this life and coveting the things the world offers
- He’s living for the next life

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There’s something else we also can’t have...and this brings us to the next part of Lesson 1...

## LESSON 1: WE CAN’T HAVE (PART II) LASTING CONTENTMENT WITHOUT GODLINESS.

It’s possible to have temporary contentment w/o godliness, but that’s what it is: temporary. It doesn’t last.

Two OT examples came to mind.

Think about Ahab...

He was the king of Israel. He was:

- Famous
- Powerful
- Wealthy
- He had more than most people could ever imagine

You’d expect him to be content – and for some time he was – but it didn’t last.

One day he saw Naboth’s vineyard. He coveted. Naboth wouldn’t give it to him. Listen to what happened...

**1 Kin 21:4 Ahab went into his house VEXED AND SULLEN because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said to him, for he had said, “I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.” And he lay down on his bed and turned away his face and would eat no food.**

His contentment was gone, b/c it wasn’t accompanied by godliness.

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The second example I’d like to show you. Please mark **1 Tim 6** as we’ll come back to it, and turn to is **Esther 3:10**. The last historical book before the poetical books. If you reach Job, Psalms, and Proverbs, you went too far.

You know the account: Haman wants to see the Jews exterminated. Look at **Est 3:10**...

**Est 3:10 So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews. 11 And the king said to Haman, “The money is given to you, the people also, to do with them as it seems good to you.”**

Things could not be going better for Haman:

- The king gave him his signet ring to do what he wanted
- He gets to murder the Jews
- He offered to pay 10,000 talents – or 375 tons – of silver to murder the Jews, and the king let him keep the money.

Needless to say, Haman is a content man!

Skip to **Est 5:9**...

**Est 5:9a And Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart.**

Pause right here.

This means he went out from the king's presence. As you'd guess, he looks pretty content, doesn't he?

But contentment w/o godliness doesn't last. Look at the rest of **verse 9**...

**Est 5:9b But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he neither rose nor trembled before him, he was filled with wrath against Mordecai. 10 Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home, and he sent and brought his friends and his wife Zeresh.**

Haman looks like Ahab: he doesn't get his way so he complains to his wife.

Listen to everything Haman had going for him...

**Est 5:11 And Haman recounted to them the splendor of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which the king had honored him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and the servants of the king. 12 Then Haman said, "Even Queen Esther let no one but me come with the king to the feast she prepared. And tomorrow also I am invited by her together with the king.**

Haman had more going on than we saw in chapter 3. He's got:

- Riches
- Lots of sons
- Promotions – plural – above all the other officials and king's servants
- He knows he's the only one invited to the feast the queen prepared...he doesn't know yet that it's going to result in his death!

He has so much reason to be content, but look at **verse 13**...

**Est 5:13 Yet all this is worth nothing to me, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.”**

His contentment is gone, but it's about to return...

**Est 5:14 Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, “Let a gallows fifty cubits high be made, and in the morning tell the king to have Mordecai hanged upon it. Then go joyfully with the king to the feast.” This idea pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made.**

His contentment's back...but it will be gone again when he learns he's the one who's going to hang on the gallows...which would probably threaten our contentment too!

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Here are the two points I'd like you to learn from Ahab and Haman:

1. Contentment is independent of circumstances. Both of these men had every reason to be content...but they were still miserable.
2. Contentment doesn't last w/o godliness. No matter how good they were feeling, it didn't last b/c they were ungodly.

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Now if you're like me – and pretty much every person who's ever lived except Jesus – you know you haven't always been content. So you have this nagging question...

*“Am I like Ahab and Haman – am I an ungodly person – b/c I've been discontent?”*

One of the major challenges w/ preaching is finding the right balance between conviction and discouragement:

- I don't want to make you feel like your sin is okay...and discontentment is a sin, so you shouldn't feel okay about it.
- But at the same time, I don't want you to be too hard on yourselves...and cause you to doubt your salvation, when you're saved.

And this is one of those times we can be too hard on ourselves.

If we consider some of the greatest men in Scripture, they were discontent at times:

- Moses was discontent w/ the people of Israel, and he was discontent when God said He wouldn't accompany the nation into the land
- Elijah was so discontent w/ his life he wanted to die
- David seemed discontent in the psalms when he was running from Saul and later his son, Absalom
- Jeremiah was discontent when the whole nation was against him
- Job was discontent...through most of his book

These were godly men, but they struggled w/ contentment.

So let me tell you how to read **1 Tim 6:6**:

- Don't read it as, *"When I'm discontent, I'm an ungodly, evil person who's not a Christian and on his – or her – way to hell."*
- Instead:
  - Read it as, *"When I'm godly and content, I have great gain. It is a wonderful thing. I should be thankful for this grace in my life."*
  - Read it as God saying, *"This is good for you to have these two together. If you want to have a full, blessed life, pursue godliness with contentment."*

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Now I know what you're saying...

*"Well, this sounds well and good, but:*

- *How can I be content?"*
- *What can I regularly tell myself that will help me put off covetousness and put on contentment?"*

You guys have the best questions!

And the Bible has the best answers!

Turn back to **1 Tim 6:7**...

**1 Tim 6:7 for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.**

This is a staggeringly powerful verse about contentment!

Here's why...

Last week we talked about the close relationship between covetousness and discontentment:

- We covet b/c we're discontent w/ what we have.
- We're content when we don't covet anything.

Covetousness and contentment are mutually exclusive:

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

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If your contentment is threatened b/c you covet something, think of this verse!

As soon as you consider that whatever you covet:

- Is temporary...
- You can't take it w/ you...

It comes into focus and loses value...and it's hard to covet something that has no value!

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Listen to these familiar verses from Jesus...

**Matt 6:19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth (in other words, don't covet, and here's why...), where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up**

**for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.**

The main point of these verses is we should focus on the eternal versus the temporal.

But nestled in the middle, Jesus tells us WHY we shouldn't covet anything in this life:

- It breaks down
- It rusts
- It decays
- People can steal it from us

Again, there's no value!

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Consider this verse...

**2 Cor 4:18 We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are [TEMPORARY NASB], but the things that are unseen are eternal.**

All the physical things we covet in this life don't last.

What happens when we keep this in mind?

- Whatever we covet loses value
- It's easier to be content

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Let me say it like this...

A heart of contentment begins with an eternal perspective that sees the temporary nature of this life's possessions...and this brings us to Lesson 2...

## **LESSON 2: WE CAN BE CONTENT BY FOCUSING ON THE TEMPORARY NATURE OF THIS LIFE.**

We've talked many times before that God is repetitive when He wants to make sure we don't miss something. As Paul Tripp says, "*We suffer from eternal amnesia.*"

Apparently, God doesn't want us missing the truth of **1 Tim 6:7** b/c it's repeated throughout Scripture:

- **Job 1:21** He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return."
- **Psa 49:17** When he dies he will carry nothing away; his glory will not go down after him.
- **Ecc 5:15** As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand.

We come into this life w/ nothing and we leave w/ nothing...and God repeats this so many times, b/c He wants us living in light of this reality.

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For a moment let's define death...

Some people might say it's:

- When we stop breathing for good
- Or when our heart stops beating for good
- Or when our brain stops functioning for good

I looked on dictionary.com, and it defined death as, *"The total and permanent cessation of all the vital functions of an organism."*

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After reading this definition, I thought, "Why don't I ask our very own expert on the subject!"

Any guesses who that is?

Sterling Baune! He's a nurse.

He gave me permission to share his answer...

*"Officially you are dead when there is no breath taken and no heartbeat for 1 minute. You quit living awhile before that."*

The best biblical definition I can come up with is: "death is when the spirit leaves the body."

I base this on:

- **Jam 2:26a The body apart from the spirit is dead**
- **Acts 7:59 As they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."**
- **Matt 27:50 Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.**

The spirit is immaterial, or non-physical, and the body is material, or physical.

When the spirit leaves the body it brings nothing material or physical w/ it...which means we leave everything behind.

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Babies aren't just born penniless, they're born w/o even pockets to put pennies in. We come into the world w/ absolutely nothing...and we go out of this world the same way.

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**Pro 23:5 When your eyes light on [wealth], it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven.**

Riches have a tendency to fly away when we least expect it...and if there's one time they really fly away, it's when we die.

John Piper said regarding our deaths...

*“At the greatest crisis of your life [referring to when you die], when you need contentment, and hope, and security more than any other time, your money and all your possessions take wings and fly away. They let you down. They are fair-weather friends at best. And you enter eternity with nothing but the measure of contentment that you had in God.”<sup>i</sup>*

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Listen to this...

Malcom Forbes was an American entrepreneur and he's most well-known as the publisher of "Forbes" magazine. He's also remembered for a number of quotes, and probably the most famous is, *“He who has the most toys wins.”*

Just as you'd expect from someone who said this, he lived an extravagant, flamboyant lifestyle. He spent millions – or perhaps billions – on parties, traveling, his collection of yachts, aircraft, art, motorcycles, castles, hot air balloons, and Fabergé eggs...the fancy Russian eggs, some of which cost over one million dollars.

When I was growing up there was a popular line of clothing called, “No Fear.” I'm not even going to ask if anyone remembers it, b/c the lack of response will probably make me feel old. Although it was a secular clothing company, they had one shirt that corrected Malcom's quote...

*“He who dies with the most toys still dies.”*

The secular clothing line was considerably more biblical than Malcolm Forbes:

- They recognized that regardless of how much we have – as Jesus said – we can't **add a single hour – or cubit – to the span of [our lives]**.
- They also recognized we can't take any of our “toys” – or possessions – w/ us, b/c if we could, then the one who died w/ the most toys would be the winner.

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We know the answer to this question...

*“How much did he leave behind?”*

All of it!

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You never see a U-Haul behind a hearse b/c they aren't taking anything w/ them:

- Whatever wealth or possessions we accumulated are left to others: friends, family, neighbors, the church, or – worst of all – the government.
- We don't know exactly where it goes: we just know it doesn't go w/ us.

And why are we talking about all this?

Because remembering we're not taking any of the physical stuff w/ us is one of the best ways to be content!

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Let's look at an account in the OT that illustrates what we're discussing and gives us the view we should have.

Please turn to **Dan 5**. We won't turn back to **1 Tim**...until next week.

Belshazzar was the king of Babylon, which was the superpower of the day. While I can't say whether he was the richest, most powerful, most famous person in the world, I can say he was at least close.

**Dan 5:1 King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in front of the thousand.**

You know you're rich, famous, and powerful, when you have one thousand lords at your party. Look at **verse 3**...

**Dan 5:3 Then they brought in the golden vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. 4 They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.**

Babylon conquered the Jews and destroyed the temple, but first they took all the gold and vessels from it.

It wasn't enough for Belshazzar to simply get drunk, he had to make sure he antagonized God while doing it w/ the vessels from the temple.

Things were going well, until look at **verse 5**...

**Dan 5:5 Immediately the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, opposite the lampstand. And the king saw the hand as it wrote. (now look at what might be the best, concise description of terror in the Bible...) 6 Then the king's color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together.**

You know you're terrified when your knees knock together!

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To shorten this up a little, I'll tell you what happened...

Belshazzar tried to get all the magicians and occultists to read the words, but they couldn't. The queen knew there was one man who could, and that was Daniel. Look at **verse 16**...

**Dan 5:16 [Belshazzar said to Daniel], "I have heard that you can give interpretations and solve problems. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, (listen to everything Daniel could receive...) you shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom."**

Daniel was offered:

- Wealth and riches...the most common thing people covet
- Fame, power, and position in the most powerful nation in the world – a nation that has parties with thousands of rulers at-at-time – which would be the other things people covet.

But look at Daniel’s response...

**Dan 5:17 Then Daniel answered and said before the king, “Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another. Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king and make known to him the interpretation.**

Daniel didn’t covet anything the king offered. Do you know why?

You could say, “Because he was a godly man,” and that’s true, but the verses reveal another reason. Look at **verse 25**...

**Dan 5:25 And this is the writing that was inscribed: Mene, Mene, Tekel, and Parsin. 26 This is the interpretation of the matter: Mene, God has numbered the days of your kingdom (Babylon) and brought it to an end; 27 Tekel, you (Belshazzar) have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; 28 Peres, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”**

Belshazzar’s kingdom was going to be conquered in the near future.

Daniel knew how temporary all of this was!

**Dan 5:29 Then Belshazzar gave the command, and Daniel was clothed with purple, a chain of gold was put around his neck, and a proclamation was made about him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.**

Belshazzar gave it to Daniel anyway...but look what happened...

**Dan 5:30 That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. 31 And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.**

The Medes and Persians conquered Babylon that very night, which means Daniel only enjoyed all this for a few hours.

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You could say, “*Well, sure, that’s easy for Daniel to be content and not covet what Belshazzar offered b/c he was only going to enjoy it for a short period of time, but I covet things that I can enjoy for years or decades!*”

But here’s the thing...

If we have an eternal perspective, whether it’s:

- A few hours...

- A few years...
- A few centuries...
- Or even a few millennia...

We're still talking about a short period of time.

And this brings us to Lesson 3...

### LESSON 3: WE ONLY ENJOY WHAT WE COVET FOR A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME.

Keeping this in mind is one of the most powerful ways to be content!

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Picture this...

There's a house you've been coveting for as long as you can remember. As a result, you're completely discontent w/ your house.

Then one day the owner of the house hands you the keys and says, "*You can have it. It's all yours.*"

You're super excited...but then he says, "*The only catch is, it's going to burn down in a couple hours.*"

How excited are you now...how attached are you to this house you had to have?

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Can you see why I'm saying this?

This is the case w/ everything the world offers. It's all burning down in a couple hours.

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The Christian life must be lived by keeping the shortness of it in view:

- When Jonathan Edwards was just 19, he wrote down 34 resolutions that he committed to practice for God's glory. Number 9 was, "*To think much, on all occasions, of my dying.*"
- This might sound a little morbid, but the point is:
  - He wanted to live in light of eternity...
  - He wanted to live always thinking about life coming to an end
  - Remembering it's temporary

And I'm sure that helped him be content w/ however little he had!

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Jonathan Edwards isn't the only one who thinks we should focus on the shortness of life.

God wants us thinking about it too...and we know that b/c He keeps repeating it...here are just four of many verses I could give you:

- **Jam 4:14 What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.**
- **Job 7:7 My life is a breath**

- **Psa 102:3 My days pass away like smoke**
- **Psa 144:4 Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow.**

God also wants us living in light of eternity.

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Let me conclude by connecting the dots...

We covet, and whatever we covet destroys our contentment.

But if we adopt an eternal perspective that recognizes:

- We can't take any of our possessions w/ us
- This life is short

We see that whatever we're coveting will only be enjoyed for a VERY short period of time.

This eternal perspective allows us to put off whatever we covet and be content w/ what we have.

Adam Clarke said...

*"It requires but little of this world's goods to satisfy a man who feels himself to be a citizen of another country, and knows that this is not his [home]."*

Let's pray.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/battling-the-unbelief-of-covetousness>