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# Be Content

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## 1 Timothy 6: 6-10

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Paul makes several radical statements about his being content (*Philippians 4:11*, *2 Corinthians 12:10*, *1 Timothy 6:8*) – is it really possible for us to live this way? Do you feel at ease with what you have, a stillness in your spirit... or are you constantly striving, running hard to a finish line which always seems to be disappearing over the horizon?

If you asked people, “Do you have enough, all that you want?” most would instinctively say no. When Paul talks about “those who desire to be rich” he isn’t referring to millionaires who want to be billionaires, but any of us who want more than the basics of life. Most of us wouldn’t say, “I want to be rich” but we still put our hopes and efforts into getting what wealth offers, the normal middle class lifestyle. A way of assessing whether we’re desiring wealth is to ask this question, from Paul Tripp: *“How is your present disappointment or discouragement a window onto what has captured your heart?”*

Paul makes three arguments to convince us that contentment cannot come from wealth...

**1. The positive argument:** *“there is great gain in godliness with contentment”* (verse 6). He isn’t saying, ‘Be happy with what you have,’ but ‘Be happy with Jesus alone’ (*Philippians 3:8*).

Augustine recognised this: *“You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our heart is*

*restless until it finds its rest in You.*” As we spend time with Him, fixing on our eyes on Him, listening to Him, following Him, we find this to be true. This is what the so-called prosperity gospel gets so horribly wrong: God is not a means to an end (riches or dreams coming true) but rather He is the end of all our searching (*Psalms 16:11*).

It is from Him that we receive what we need most, the only thing we truly need: salvation, the forgiveness of our sins, being made right in God’s eyes, is given to us as a gift. Jesus earned for us what we could never get for ourselves, through His perfect life, sacrificial death on the cross, and resurrection to eternal life. What we experience now by faith is just a glimpse of what is to come (*2 Corinthians 4:17-18*). Can what you’re hoping in, striving for, promise you this?

**2. The matter-of-fact case against putting your hope in wealth today**(verse 7). *Job 1:21* and *Psalms 49:16-20* make the same point: when we die, we leave all our possessions behind.

Charles Spurgeon: *“What folly it is to spend all one’s time in gathering a heap to leave it so soon.”* Jesus returned to us from beyond the grave telling us that there is a life to come, so it’s ridiculous for Christians to act like this life is all there is.

**3. The negative case: chasing after wealth won’t get you what you want**(verses 9 and 10). You might think “I’m nowhere near what verses 9 and 10 describe happening to me” - that’s why Paul says it’s a trap! No-one thinks, “Going after money is bound to ruin my life so I’m going to do exactly that” but something catches their eye, and then their heart, and then they’re snared and stuck in a way of living, and then they’re destroyed.

If you’re not content with what you have and that becomes the criteria by which you make decisions, it requires you to make compromises, to do things you wouldn’t advise others to do, to use people or envy them rather than bless them. You have to give less time for other things like family and friendships and church life. You call these decisions “sacrifices,” forgetting what a religious word that is: because when you make anything other than God the basis of your decision-making, you’re kicking Him off the throne of your life. It’s the idolatry that’s deadly.

And here’s the other miserable thing about seeking to be wealthier – even if you succeed you won’t be satisfied! Envy, rivalry, bitterness and jealousy, these are the kind of fruit that the root of loving money produces. Even if you experience none of

these negatives, wealth and possessions are irrelevant to what really matters in God's assessment (*Luke 12:16-21, Matthew 16:26*).

How can we avoid this, escape the trap?

### **1. Give thanks**

Godliness, salvation, is what you need – and that is exactly what you've got in Christ. Celebrate it, give thanks for it every day: rehearse it in your mind, repeat it to yourself, sing about it, savour the good news of forgiveness, relationship with God, and eternal hope.

It's also OK to give thanks for what you've been given by your generous Father ( *Timothy 6:17b*) but how can we enjoy nice things without falling into the trap Paul described? Helpful questions:

- Do you think more about the Giver or the gift?
- Are you more aware of what you've been given than what you want?
- Are your prayers only requests and never thanksgivings?

### **2. Give away**

This isn't foolproof but if you give stuff you own away, and don't go out looking for more, the desire for things can lessen. Sacrificial giving actively fights against accumulating wealth in two ways.

- You'll have less money (if you give it at the start of the month, not the end).
- You'll be focusing your heart elsewhere, on the church and other Kingdom investments (*Matthew 6:21*).

### **3. Give up chasing after the wind**

Give it up, stop running after what you'll never catch up with (*Ecclesiastes 2:9-11*). Take practical steps to avoid a consuming / coveting mentality.

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Statement on simple living from the *Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation*.

“We resolve to renounce waste and oppose extravagance in personal living, clothing and housing, travel and church buildings. We also accept the distinction between necessities and luxuries, creative hobbies and empty status symbols, modesty and vanity, occasional celebrations and normal routine, and between the service of God and slavery to fashion. Where to draw the line requires conscious thought and decision by us, together with members of our family.”

## Questions

- What was your immediate response to Luke's preach?
- On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 being "not at all" and 10 being "totally"), how much do you think you are living in agreement with what the Bible says: *"if we have food and clothing/covering, with these we will be content"*? What causes your contentment levels to vary?
- *"How is your present disappointment or discouragement a window onto what has captured your heart?"* (Paul Tripp)
- *How does a desire to be rich manifest itself in your life?*
- \_Which of the three arguments that Paul makes for "godliness with contentment" is most persuasive to you: the positive case of satisfaction with Christ, the matter-of-fact nature of life and death, or the negative case of the impossibility of contentment if we desire to be wealthy?
- How shocking is Jesus' parable in *Luke 12:16-21* to how we think and live?
- When something is as ingrained into our culture as consumerism is, thinking and living differently will be very counter-intuitive - how can you teach yourself to do this? \* How can you as a small group encourage each other in it?
- Of the three application points Luke gave - give thanks, give away, give up - which do you think will be the most challenging for you?



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