

INTRODUCTION:

This morning, I would like for us to take a few moments to consider the idea of contentment.

- As Thomas Jefferson and the signers of the Declaration of Independence would say, we have been endowed by God with certain unalienable rights such as the pursuit of happiness.
- What is the source of happiness and where does a person find it?

“**The Eagles**” would tell us that if we want a “**peaceful easy feeling**,” we can find it in a relationship.

- That popular song is about a man sleeping with a woman in the desert under a billion stars.
- “**I know you won’t let me down... ‘cause I’m already standing on the ground.**”
- And yet near the end of the song the man acknowledges that he might not see her again... and even despite that, he has a “**peaceful easy feeling...**”
- My point is that there are a lot of people that will say that true contentment will come from relationships.
- And to a degree, I can agree that our friendships with others can give us a great deal of contentment in life.

Others will say if you want to be content, you just need to have a balanced bank account.

- If you have a well managed bank account and know your expenses are being covered, that gives a person the comfort they are seeking
- And frankly, there are a lot of people that are perfectly happy in life because of their financial status.
- And again, I completely agree that having stability in this area of life brings contentment.

The fact is, people pursue contentment in a wide variety of ways...

- They spend a lot of time with their families.
- They do a lot of traveling and that makes them happy.
- Or they have employment that they enjoy and they spend a lot of their time at work.
- Or they seek out contentment through popularity or focusing on their beauty.

As a matter of fact, I would like to even suggest that people can be perfectly content while completely engrossed in a wide variety of sinful activities!

- Some level of contentment or happiness can be found in just about anything that we choose to pursue!

I will say this, however... I believe that a lot of people are perfectly content in their sinful lives because of ignorance.

- They’ve been given the impression from the world around them that these wide assortment of sinful activities are perfectly acceptable and therefore their consciences don’t bother them.
- Because they know God is a loving and forgiving God, they completely ignore the fact that God also expects obedience to His commands.

So this morning, rather than thinking about all of these things that only bring a temporary contentment while we are living upon this earth, I would like for us to focus our attention of five keys to lasting contentment that can bring us contentment here, and more importantly, in the life beyond.

- As we begin looking at these five keys, I would like to acknowledge Allen Webster who wrote an article in one of our brotherhood publications—And this is where I developed many of my thoughts for this morning’s sermon.

I put a little “teaser” article in a couple of the local papers that indicated that Paul seemed to have had a contentment “*in any and every circumstance*” because of the fact that he had “*lived his life with a perfectly good conscience before God.*”

- It seems to me that this a key element for us to have contentment... We must be at peace with ourselves if pursuing contentment is a part of our plan in life!
- The fact of the matter is, God knows what is best for us and He wants us to have a true, lasting contentment.

The words “joy” and “peace” and “contentment” and related synonyms are used in the scriptures nearly 900 times and in perhaps every book of the Bible.

- If we were to do a thorough study on the ways in which the Bible offers true contentment, we would be here for a very long time this morning.
- The truth is, the Bible is absolutely full of contentment-producing solutions.

Please turn in your Bibles to **Proverbs 19:23**...

I. As we look at this passage, I would like for us to consider that a true-lasting contentment begins with a FEAR OF GOD.

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Whenever we read from the writings of King Solomon, I think that is important that we remember that God had granted him more wisdom than anyone else who would ever walk the face of the earth.

- As we read **Proverbs 19:23**, therefore, let us remember the wisdom of his words.
- He very simply said, “*The fear of the LORD leads to life, So that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil.*”

Now, as we begin carefully examining these words, we find that a key part of that verse is the words “*leads to life.*”

- The contentment comes from knowing that God promised eternal life to those who fear Him.
- Therefore, Solomon said, “*The fear of the LORD leads to life...*”
- It causes us to seek to do His will, therefore it leads to eternal life.

I would like to suggest that anyone who wants eternal life, must therefore begin by having a healthy fear of God.

- And I think this is where it comes back to what I was talking about earlier when I said that some people only think of God as a loving and forgiving god.
- If we really know God and if we truly want to understand Him, we will know that His wrath is something to fear.
- We would have an incredible amount of reverence toward His word and we would diligently seek a better understanding of His will for us.

William Randolph Hearst was a multi-millionaire who was an avid art collector and had invested a fortune into his paintings from around the world.

- One day he read the description of a valuable art item and sent his agent abroad to find it.
- After months of searching, the agent reported that he had finally found the treasure.
- To the surprise of Hearst, the priceless treasure had been stored in his own warehouse.
- He had spent a lot of time and money searching for something that was readily available to Him.

The word of God is readily available and in **2 Timothy 1:14**, Paul refers to it as a treasure that needs to be guarded.

- If we diligently seek the word of God, we will develop a healthy fear of God which Solomon said *“leads to life.”*
- Assurance about eternal life allowed Solomon to *“sleep satisfied.”*

After a long, difficult day, there is nothing more satisfying than to sprawl out on the bed, take a big stretch, take a deep breath, let all of those worries out, snuggle up close to your pillow, and drift effortlessly to sleep.

- If you are one who struggles with your sleep, I might suggest one thing that works for me to put my mind at ease—That is taking all of the day’s activities and praying to God for a good night’s rest.

When Traci and I were down at Harding University in Searcy, Arkansas, the school would bring in different performers from time to time as part of the student activities calendar.

- And they brought in a hypnotist by the name of Gil Eagle that I will never forget.
- He expressed to the crowd that there was nothing magical about performing a hypnotism and that he could not force a person do anything that they did not want to do.
- He would simply get them to relax so much that they could overcome the fear of being up in front of 2000 people and do some of the silliest things that they would normally never do in public.

One of the things that he said to those he had hypnotized before he brought them out, was that they would come out of that state feeling good, and refreshed, and energetic.

- I remember Mr. Eagles making reference to **“the power of suggestion”** and it occurred to me as I was preparing this sermon, that there seems to be a connection between sleeping well at night and our ability to relax and turn things over to God.

At the end of **Proverbs 19:23**, Solomon mentioned sleeping satisfied, *“untouched by evil.”*

- You see, fearing God also involves a knowledge that God protects the faithful.
- We can sleep well at night because we know that God is in complete control.

In all of Solomon’s wisdom, he expressed that a fear of the Lord lead’s to life, gives one protection from evil, and ultimately brings a level of contentment that will allow one to sleep better at night.

II. Let’s turn to **Matthew 5:6** and consider another key to contentment...**STRONG DESIRE FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

And again, as we look at this passage we can consider the source.

- This is Jesus talking and He is just beginning the Sermon on the Mount.
- He had literally just begun His three or so years of ministry and this is the very first recorded sermon of Jesus.
- And right there at the very beginning of that sermon, He said, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit... Blessed are those who mourn... Blessed are the gentle...”* and then in **Matthew 5:6** He wrote this... *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”*

I was at the Wildcats basketball championship game against Mt Vernon last night.

- During half time, I noticed someone bring out a great big trophy that was going to be presented to the winner of that game after the final buzzer.

- And I'm telling you, those boys were all hungering and thirsting to get their hands on that ball and were very aggressive in pursuing opportunities to take a shot.

Jesus said that we should hunger and thirst for righteousness.

- Can you imagine if all of the residents of Salem would hunger and thirst for righteousness in the same way that those boys were to win a meaningless game?
- Don't get me wrong... I love the game of basketball and I understand the value of having sports in a community... but in the grand scheme of things, basketball doesn't determine our eternal destiny.

Think for a moment, what else people hunger and thirst for.

- Their jobs, money, relationships, fame, prestige... however, in the end, a person that is laying in their death bed is not all that concerned about any of those things.
- All of those things are meaningless.
- As the apostle Paul told the Colossians, "*Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.*" (Colossians 3:2)

Jesus promised that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness "*shall be satisfied.*"

- The question that we should all be asking ourselves is... what do we hunger and thirst for?
- When we get home from working all day do we hunger and thirst for a good book? Or do we hunger and thirst for THE good book?
- When Sunday evening rolls around, do we hunger and thirst for more worship? Or do we hunger and thirst for more relaxation?
- When the collection plate is passed around do we hunger and thirst for supporting the works of the church? Or do we hunger and thirst for material possessions that we'd rather save that money for?

If we really want a true, and lasting contentment in life, we will hunger and thirst for doing what is right in God's eyes and as a result we will be "*satisfied!*"

Please turn to **Isaiah 55** and we'll take a look at a third key to a lasting contentment...

III. I would like to suggest a need to A TRUST IN GOD'S PRESENCE.

The prophet Isaiah has just written a chapter of the Bible that is absolutely full of prophecies about the Messiah that would someday come and would offer himself as a guilt offering for the iniquities of mankind.

- When we get to **chapter 55**, we find that Isaiah is offering an invitation to turn their lives over to God.
- Let's read **Isaiah 55:1-3**... Notice how many times he implores them to "**come.**"

1 "Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk Without money and without cost.

2 "Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And delight yourself in abundance.

3 "Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, According to the faithful mercies shown to David.

The clear urging that we can see from Isaiah is that God wants people to "**come**" and to submit to God.

- There's no financial cost!
- The main point to his questioning was basically, why do you spend your wages on "**what does not satisfy?**"

- Come into the presence of God and “*Listen, that you may live...*”
- Again, it is clear that God is offering eternal life.
- The problem is that people have distanced themselves from God.

James, the half-brother of Jesus, said “*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you...*” (James 4:8)

- And even when you get down to the very last five verses of the Bible, it says, “*The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.*” (Revelation 22:17)

It sounds an awful lot like the passage that Isaiah wrote doesn't it?

- God pleads with us throughout the Bible to draw close to Him... to put our trust in His presence and to put our worries behind us.
- As Paul said, “*If God is for us, who is against us?*” (Romans 8:31)

Not too long ago, I found a fortune cookie that said, “**Never trouble trouble till trouble trouble's you.**”

- I think that makes a lot of sense.
- There is no use in worrying about potential troubles before they actually become a trouble.
- I have heard it said that, “**worry is the dark room in which negatives can develop.**”
- I would like to suggest that “**worry**” is one of the greatest enemies of “**contentment.**”
- And when we get to the point in our lives when we can turn all of those worries over to God, we have reached a point when a true contentment can exist.
- Yet, it involves fully putting your trust in the presence of God.

Have you drawn near unto God? Have you made an effort to really get who He is?

- I have a friend in college who used to call God “Daddy” in his prayers.
- He was a man, probably in his mid 40s who had served some jail time for who knows what and to us on the outside his prayers sounded irreverent—But to him, God was there for him.
- Are you close enough to God, to be able to call Him Daddy?
- If not, it might be time that you put your trust in the presence of God.

IV. The fourth key to contentment that I would like to propose comes from Acts 27:25, where we will find that lasting contentment comes through a TRUST IN GOD'S PROMISES

Here we have the apostle Paul who was being shipped by the Mediterranean Sea to the city of Rome.

- Paul warned the Centurion who had charge over him that this voyage would involve “damage and great loss” to the cargo and to the ship.
- They got into a storm called “**Euraquilo**” (Which means Northeaster) and they had to use supporting cable just to hold the ship together.
- They had to throw the cargo and the ship's tackle overboard by the third day.
- After many days they were growing hungry and then an angel of the Lord told Paul that he must see Caesar and that they would all be okay.

And in Acts 27:25, Paul spoke to the crew and said, “*Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told.*”

- You see... Paul knows that God always fulfills every promise!
- Paul knew the scriptures and all of the promises that God has made and He has always given exactly what He has said that He would give to those who obey Him.

When Paul wrote to the Philippians, he told them about how God will provide... He wrote, “*I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means,*

and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.” (Phil 4:11-12)

- The thing is, God’s promise of salvation brought Paul to a point in his life, that he was willing to do absolutely anything that God wanted him to.
- Paul experienced a lot of VERY difficult circumstances!
- However, he was perfectly content to suffer, because He put his trust in God’s promises.

V. There is one final key to contentment in Acts 4 that cannot be overlooked. It is an absolute necessity, if we want a lasting contentment, for us to have a close RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST.

True peace—true contentment only comes through an assurance of eternal salvation.

- Very shortly after the church was established on the day of Pentecost, Peter was preaching about how Jesus was the “*corner stone*” that would be rejected and in Acts 4:12, He said, “*And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.*”
- You see, Peter had heard Jesus say, “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.*” (John 14:6)
- Peter had heard Jesus say that even some religious people would be told, “*I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME...*” (Matthew 7:23)
- Peter had also heard Jesus say, “*He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'*” (John 7:37)
- Anyone who desires a true and lasting contentment must choose to have a close relationship with the “*Prince of Peace.*” (Isaiah 9:6)

CONCLUSION & INVITATION:

There are many sources of temporary contentment in this life and there are many things that can make us feel at ease and comfortable.

- But I don’t want to live in the lap of luxury with no worries or concerns, always doing my own thing, only to find out in the end that I should have been more concerned about eternity!
- Do you have these things? Do you Fear God? Hunger and thirst for Righteousness? Trust in His presence? And His promises?
- What about your relationship with Jesus Christ? That is where true contentment comes from!

The question now arises... Have I loved God enough to be unconditionally obedient to Him?

- If you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and if you have confessed His name and repented of your sins, followed by immersion for the forgiveness of your sins, you are on the road to true contentment.
- If you have not taken these steps in your life, we would like to encourage you to come forward as we stand and sing...