



ENOUGH

“Living with Contentment”

(Biblical Text: Philippians 4:4-13)

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Let me start by saying that this has been a tough week for your pastors. It has. And a lot of what’s been happening has been simply wonderful. It really has.

We had a confirmation retreat and fifteen confirmation students, most of whom we have seen grow up through Old Mission’s children’s ministry, are preparing to say yes to *life-changing faith* in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. That’s pretty cool!

Sunday night, thirty-two youth and their adult sponsors served an amazing **Thanksgiving Dinner**. We set up extra tables, and prayed that the dressing would stretch far enough! I don’t know how you feel, but that’s worth celebrating!

But last weekend and this week, and again yesterday morning, I also gathered with friends and loved ones to surrender two of our members to the everlasting care of Almighty God, who gave them life. *Jim DeGoler* and *Carola Halderman* finished their earthly journey and began their eternal one. And their families began a different kind of journey through grief and loss and remembrance. And it was my privilege, along with Pastor Karen to walk that journey with them.

Of all the things we do, that service is among the most sacred. But it is not easy. It also would have been my sister’s 61st birthday last Friday. Most of you know that, like Carola Halderman, she died unexpectedly not long ago.

It seems almost providential that my topic for this message in our series *“ENOUGH: Discovering Joy through Simplicity”* was planned to be on what it means to live with *contentment* as Christians. I think it was God’s timing.

I think one of the toughest issues we face as Christians, living as we do in our affluent western world, is how to know when to say **enough!** For us, the big question about our possessions is this: *“What would it take for me to be content?”* Or, to put it others way, *“How much do I really need?”* *“How much is enough?”*

Pastor Leslie reminded all of us a couple of weeks ago in the traditional services, that every child has heard their parents say *“That’s enough!”* *“Enough Halloween candy!”* *“Enough whining for something at the store!”* When I reached my teen years it was *“Enough back talk, young man!”* When my mother brought out all three of my names, *“Michael Frank Gardner!”* I knew I had gone from *enough* to *“too much!”* When Ann pulls out all three names today – **it means the same!**

For two weeks now, I've been asking you to put one of these **"Enough"** cards in your wallets and pocketbooks, and on your key chains with the hope that you'll apply that word to your personal finances. It's too soon to know what the affect will be but there are two immediate outcomes I know.

First our estimates of giving so far are ahead of where they were last year, and people have been increasing their giving a little and some new persons are committing their financial support to Old Mission – that's worth celebrating!

The second outcome is this. Last Sunday, I overheard one of our members saying, *"I'll tell you what I've had enough of, and that's sermons about money. That was two in a row!"* Of course they didn't know I heard! But I was not surprised. People look forward to sermons about money only slightly less than they look forward to a root canal. But hey! When you need one, you need one!

So, I'm not going to talk about money, not directly. I'm going to talk about contentment. In *1 Timothy 6:6*, Paul says: *"Godliness with contentment is great gain."*

The question is what is contentment? Paul's answer is clear. Jesus Christ Himself is *all-sufficient* (Colossians 3:11). If you have *Him*, you have everything. Any extra blessings He may decide to pour out on you are just icing on the cake. If you can see your life in this light and learn to embrace your lot, whatever it may be, with satisfaction and joy, then the richest man in the world has nothing on you. That's what Paul means when he says that godliness with contentment is *great gain*.

Contentment is the ability to say, "Enough is enough." But that's not where most of us live. The more we have, the more we crave, and the more insistent becomes our fear that someone or something may be able to take it away. That is the exact opposite of contentment, which is *"...looking back without regret, looking at the present without envy, and looking to the future without fear."*

No financial principle will have a greater impact on you or free you up to live more effectively than this one: *"Money is not the key to contentment."* Because contentment has everything to do with your relationship with God and nothing to do with your money. Once you are free from the love of money and the relentless pursuit of wealth, you can have a lot or a little and be content at the same time.

This is why our text in Philippians 4 says this: *"I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me."* (Philippians 4:11-13)

Despite the fact that we say we these words, we still find ourselves devoting a great deal of our time, talents, and resources to the acquisition of more stuff.

But every now and then something wakes us up! A number of years ago I went with a group of students and young adults to work the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in Pascagoula, Mississippi. What I saw was heart-wrenching. Modest homes that were leveled to the ground with nothing left except a concrete pad. Palatial southern mansions, ravaged by the hurricane waters, where all the resident's earthly possessions were pulled out rotting in the front yard. Suddenly all their life's possessions were totally gone. Could you just imagine? Think for a minute if you were to drive home and nothing was left but a concrete pad.

Adam Hamilton says that many of us struggle with RHS - Restless Heart Syndrome. You may have heard of restless legs syndrome (RLS), a condition in which one has twitches and contractions in the legs. Restless Heart Syndrome (RHS) works in a similar way, but in the heart—or soul. Its primary symptom is discontent. We find that we are never satisfied with anything. The moment we acquire something, we scarcely take time to enjoy it before we want something else. We are discontent. He offers **Four Key Principles** which can lead us instead to contentment.

Key Number 1: Learn to say, "It Could Be Worse." John Ortberg, pastor at Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in California, says there are four words we should say whenever we find ourselves discontented with something or someone: *"It could be worse."* This is essentially the practice of looking on the bright side or finding the silver lining. It is recognizing that no matter what, we can always find something good to focus on if only we will choose to do so.

Key Number 2: Learn to ask, "How Long Will This Make Me Happy?" So often we buy something, thinking it will make us happy, only to find that the happiness lasts about as long as it takes to open the box. There is a moment of satisfaction when we make the purchase, but the item does not continue to bring satisfaction over a period of time. Many of the things we buy are simply not worth the expense. This is why it is a good idea to try before you buy.

Key Number 3: Develop a Grateful Heart. We are to "give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). A grateful heart recognizes that all of life is a gift. Contentment comes when we spend more time giving thanks for what we have than thinking about what's missing or wrong in our lives.

Key Number 4: Learn Where True Satisfaction Comes from. Saint Augustine once said, *"Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee."* Jesus said the two most important things we must do are to *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind,"* and to *"Love your neighbor as yourself."* (Matthew 22:37, 39) If we keep our focus on these two things, we will find peace and lasting contentment.

Finally, “Which Tent Will You Live In?” Will you live in discontent or contentment? You and you alone determine which “tent” will be yours. You choose it in large part by deciding what life is about. If you decide that *“life does not consist in the abundance of your possessions,”* then you are choosing contentment. Choosing contentment means we look to God as our Source, giving thanks for what we have; we ask God to give us the right perspective on money and possessions and to change our hearts each day; we decide to live simpler lives, wasting less and conserving more; and we will choose to give more generously.

Let’s Pray:

Lord we pray that we would find our joy in you and not in our possessions. That we would find contentment in simple things rather than expensive distractions from you. Remind us of your Word: *“Godliness with contentment is great gain.”* Thank you Lord for that promise! Amen