

# Message “Cultivating Contentment”, Week 3 of “Enough” Series

Presented by Rev. Kristen Lowe on 01-21-2018

At Crossroads United Methodist Church, Waunakee, WI

With gratitude for Adam Hamilton and his book *Enough: Discovering Joy Through Generosity and Simplicity*

Hebrews 13:5-6

“Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for Christ has said, “I will never leave you or forsake you.” So we can say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.”

Ecclesiastes 2:10-11

“Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them; I kept my heart from no pleasure. . . . Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and again, all was vanity and a chasing after wind.”

Luke 12:15

And [Jesus] said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”

**PATIENT:** Doc, I keep having these dreams. First I’m a teepee; then I’m a wigwam; then I’m a teepee; then I’m a wigwam. It’s driving me crazy. What’s wrong with me?

**DOCTOR:** You need to relax. You’re two tents.



Last year, May 16<sup>th</sup>, a tornado blew through Chetek, WI. It left the longest path of damage in Wisconsin’s history. For many, everything was completely gone. Their home, their belonging... all gone.

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Lena Samuelson, who was home with her family, said, “I paused for a second to shut the door to the bathroom. And I just felt the place just go. I was tossed forward. Something hit me in the back, something hit me in the head.” At the same time, her daughter Brenna clutched little Nolan, only 3 months old, in the bathtub when the wind knocked him from her arms. They were lucky. They escaped with only cuts and bruises.



After surviving this experience, Lena Samuelson testifies that it’s a blessing that they have each other. The stuff is just stuff.



“My life does not consist in the abundance of possessions”  
(Luke 12:15).

In recent years we have witnessed a number of devastating natural disasters hurricanes, floods, wildfires, tsunamis. Natural disasters remind us that everything in this world is temporary. This is why we can say with Jesus, “[My] life does not consist in the abundance of possessions” (Luke 12:15). Yet the culture is shouting that it’s not true. The result is a wrestling in our hearts. Despite the fact that we say we believe Jesus’ words, we still find ourselves

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devoting a great deal of our time, talents, and resources to the acquisition of more stuff. We say that our lives do not consist in the abundance of our possessions, but we *live* as if they do. We never quite become satisfied with what we have. We want more. We attain what we want and then want something else. We are chronically discontent.

I’m preaching to myself again. I have what I need. But I want more of what I don’t need.

There is a certain discontent that God intended us to have. God actually wired our hearts so that they would be discontent with certain things, causing us to seek the only One who can fully satisfy us. We are meant to yearn to know God more, to cultivate a deeper prayer life, to pursue justice and holiness with increasing fervor, to love others more, and to grow in grace and character and wisdom with each passing day.



### When Discontentment Destroys

The problem is that those things we should be content with are the very things we find ourselves hopelessly discontented with. For example, we find ourselves discontented with our stuff, our jobs, our churches, our children, and our spouses are all gifts from God. All things we may have at one time yearned for and appreciated.

### Philippians 4:11-12

<sup>11</sup> I am not referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. <sup>12</sup> I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need.

### Four Keys to Cultivating Contentment

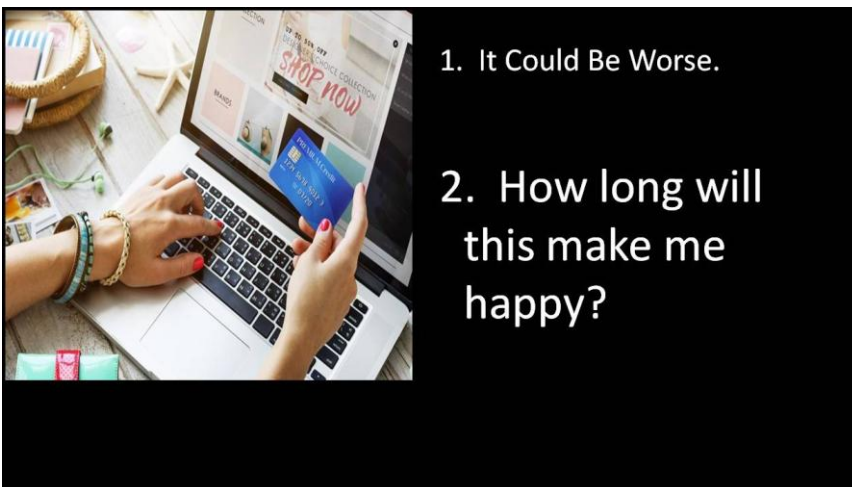
The Apostle Paul is an excellent example of contentment. In his letter to the Philippians, he wrote of the “secret” to his contentment (Philippians 4:11-12). Like Paul, we can learn to be content in whatever circumstances we may find ourselves. Four keys, which include the “secret” Paul referred to in his letter, can help us to do that.

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### Four Words to Repeat: “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 may not like about a thing or person or circumstance, we can always find something good to focus on if only we will choose to do so.

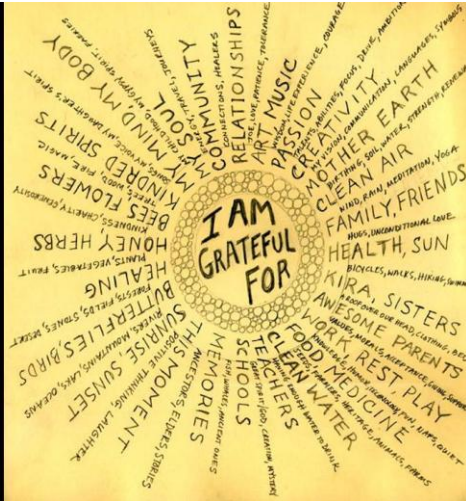


### One Question to Ask: “For How Long Will This Make Me Happy?”

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.

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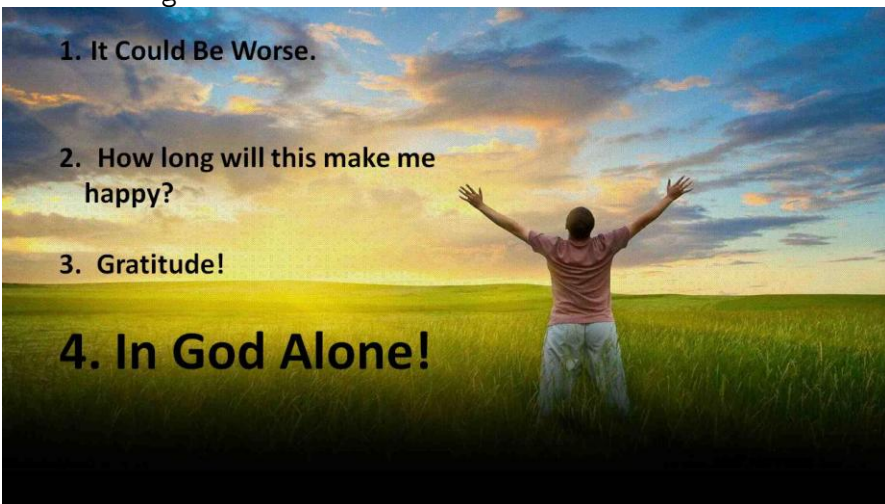
1. It Could Be Worse.
2. How long will this make me happy?
3. Gratitude



### A. Developing a Grateful Heart

Gratitude is essential if we are to be content. The Apostle Paul said that 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.

1. It Could Be Worse.
2. How long will this make me happy?
3. Gratitude!
4. In God Alone!

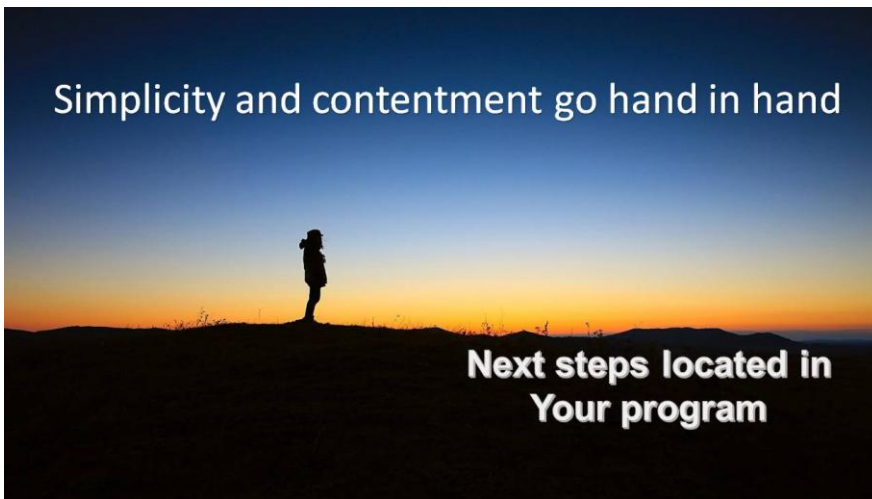


### B. Where Does Your Soul Find True Satisfaction?

The world answers this question by telling us that we find satisfaction in ease and luxury and comfort and money. The Bible, however, answers the question very differently. From Genesis to Revelation, it tells us that we find our satisfaction in God alone.

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 satisfaction for our souls and lasting contentment.

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### Five Steps for Simplifying Our Lives

In addition to cultivating contentment in our lives, we need to cultivate simplicity. Contentment and simplicity go hand in hand.

**1. Set a Goal of Reducing Your Consumption, and Live Below Your Means.**

I remember one day spending over \$200 in storage bins to hide my clutter because the current storage bins seemed cluttered.

**2. Before Making a Purchase, Ask Yourself, *Do I Really Need This? and, Why Do I Want This?***

These questions will help you to determine the true motivation of your desired purchase. Is it a need, a self-esteem issue, or something else? What's your real motive here?

**3. Use Something Up Before Buying Something New.**

Take good care of the things you buy and use them until they are empty, broken, or worn out. Buy things that are made to last; and, when buying things that have a short lifespan, spend your money wisely.

**4. Plan Low-cost Entertainment That Enriches.**

When it comes to choosing entertainment for your family or friends, plan things that are simple and cheap. You'll be amazed at how much more pleasure you derive from low-cost, simple activities.

**5. Ask Yourself; *Are There Major Changes That Would Allow Me to Simplify My Life?***

Consider selling that boat in the garage that hasn't seen water in 5 years or getting rid of a club membership you don't use. Examine your lifestyle. Remember, if you cannot do all the things God is calling you to do and you're unable to find joy in your life, perhaps it's time to simplify in some major ways.

### The Power of Self-Control

Simplifying your life comes down to practicing self control. I like to think I have it. But, the clutter in my basement tells me otherwise. Solomon wrote, "Like a city whose walls are broken down / is a [person] who lacks self-control" (Proverbs 25:28, NIV). When a city's walls are broken through, the enemy can march right in and destroy it. There is no longer any protection. Self-control is about forgoing instant gratification.

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**The Question for you today is: Which Tent Will You Live In?**

Will you live in discon-tent or con-tent-ment? 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 choose to give more generously.