

**WESTMINSTER**  
PRESBYTERIAN  
**CHURCH**



SERMON

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# Contentedness

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### Hebrews 13:1-6

Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. <sup>2</sup>Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. <sup>3</sup>Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

<sup>4</sup>Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. <sup>5</sup>Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said,

“Never will I leave you;  
never will I forsake you.”

<sup>6</sup>So we say with confidence,

“The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.  
What can mere mortals do to me?”

### Contentedness

Several years ago, as I was preparing for my very first marathon run, I wrote an article for *Westminster's Spire* that talked about how I was having to learn moderation in my eating and working toward a new type of self-control. Somewhere in this article I wrote something along the lines of, “So, if you see me with the youth group and I’m reaching for another slice of pizza, feel free to slap it out of my hand.”

The goofy thing about writing those articles is this: they're almost always written about a month before the issue is actually completed and anyone reads them, so sometimes when someone says to me, "I really like your article in the new *Spire*," it takes me a minute to remember what I wrote about. Well, a few weeks after I submitted that article one of the children's ministries had a leftover tray full of cupcakes and I graciously offered to relieve them of the whole tray, and as I walked down the hall with a tray full of cupcakes, the person sitting at the welcome desk that particular morning looked at me and said, "What was that I just read in your *Spire* article about moderation?" Busted!

Though it's not the case in every situation, I very regularly find myself wanting "more." If it was fun once, why wouldn't it be fun 3 more times? If a medium is good, why not get the large? If it's only a few more dollars for the upgrade, why not? There is zero doubt in my mind that contentment is a perennial struggle in my life. As a matter of fact, more than a few people have explicitly told me that they expect that finding contentment will be one of the greatest challenges of my life. I struggle to be content! I even used to quip that "Bigger, Faster, Stronger" would be my family's motto. Do you get the picture? So, when I read a scripture that says, "be content with what you have because God has said I will never leave you nor forsake you." I'm forced to reexamine my priorities. My desires. My goals. My motivations. I'm forced to step back and look at my behaviors and my thoughts. Busted yet again! Here

I am standing with my proverbial tray of cupcakes – a reminder that I can never get enough.

And that's really what this scripture is getting to: Do you believe that there is enough? Do you have enough and does everyone else have enough? That second part is really important; "Does everyone else have enough?" Because, as with all things related to our Christian faith, it's never just about us. Let me say that very clearly: If you, as a follower of Jesus, are talking about contentment and satisfaction, you *must* consider others. It's never just about you.

It's no surprise that's where the final encouragements begin in this letter to the Hebrews: "Keep on loving on another, don't neglect to show hospitality to strangers." Contentment isn't just about you, nor is it just about the people in your inner circle. The scripture doesn't say "keep on loving one another and don't forget to buy your best friend a Christmas gift." It doesn't say, "keep on loving one another and don't forget to compliment your boss." That's not the type of generosity that we're encouraged to.

No, what it does say is "show hospitality to strangers, because some people have taken care of angels without even knowing it." You simply can't know the whole story when you care for others.

And the scripture goes on: "show hospitality to strangers and remember those in prison and those who are mistreated" But

once again, it goes one level deeper than you might have imagined. “Remember those in prison *as if you were together with them*. Remember those who are mistreated *as if you were one in the same person*.”

As hard as you might fight for justice, or safety, or freedom, or peace for yourself – we’re called to fight with that same vigor for others. It’s never just about you. If there are people in this world who are discontent, or unsatisfied, or don’t have enough because of injustices that exist – then we must not be content either. *We* must be discontent that *they* are discontent.

Contentment, as it’s talked about in these verses, is about being able to say, “this is sufficient.” So, until we can look to both the world and our own lives and say, “this is sufficient – everyone has enough,” we are not content.

And truth be told, I don’t think that many of us are content. But it’s usually not because we are dissatisfied with injustice or suffering, it’s usually because we wish we had something different in the refrigerator. We’ve become very accustomed to our comforts. And, you know, I am always quick to hedge my bets in a situation like this and say, “but that’s not the case for everyone.” And that’s the point! Look around you, folks. Suffering isn’t hard to find. I’m sorry that your Amazon package will be a few days late, but there are bigger fish to fry.

In close to 50 different countries, more than 90% of the population lives on less than \$10/day. On average, about 25%

of the world's total population lives at or below the poverty line. In the United States in 2022, more than 14% of the population live at or below the poverty line.

That's 1/7 people in our own country. Think about that; when you're walking around the next few days, start counting people in 7s. And if you're sure that none of those 7 are living at or below the poverty level, then consider yourself very, very lucky. Because there are undoubtedly people walking around in communities where that specific number is more like 4/7, or 5/7, or 6/7. No kidding that this world is full of discontent.

But instead of working toward the health, satisfaction, and contentment of the world around us, we get selfish. We hoard. We build our own kingdoms and seek our own glory. So, it may seem like an odd jump for this scripture to go straight from "remember those who are in prison" to "keep the marriage bed pure" ...until you think about all the ways that we try to satisfy the discontent in our lives. Discontentment embodies itself in the form of greed, lust, affairs, theft, violence, and physical, relational, emotional, and mental health problems.

And then we land on the issue that we've danced around this whole time: Verse 5, "keep your life free from the love of money and be content with what you have." John Wesley said it this way, "Money never stays with me. It would burn me if it did. I throw it out of my hands as soon as possible, lest it should find its way into my heart."

I don't know about you, but I think it's a safe bet to say that money has found its way into a good many of our hearts. We're worried about retirement funds, investments, the cost of gas, the size of our loans, raises in rent, inflation, and debt – so we grasp for all that we can hold on to. All the while we forget what this scripture reminds us: God has told us “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” Jesus himself tells us that “heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” Friends, even if the whole world is crumbling around you – there is, in fact, one hope that remains.

That's the power that the writer of this letter to the Hebrews has that, I'll be honest, is much easier said than done. The last few verses of our scripture this morning say “God has said “never will I leave you nor forsake you. *So we can confidently say, The Lord is my helper, I will not fear.*”

Oh, but friends, I fear. I fear for my future, for my family, for our church, for our city, our country, our nation, our world. I do fear. I am discontent. I am selfish. I forget about my brothers and sisters. I neglect the stranger. I am broken and sinful. And I know that I'm in good company.

But I'm also redeemed. I am loved. I am pursued by Jesus who helps me even when I fear. Who never leaves me even when I leave him. Who satisfies me even when I'm discontent.



So, I pick my head up and I keep moving. One foot in front of the other. I walk toward contentedness because I know that it won't simply fall in my lap.

The writer of Philippians says that he has “learned to be content in all circumstances,” and maybe one day I will learn to be content, too. Until then, I look around at what I have, and when I'm honest with myself, I know that I have enough. And I know that it's not just about me.

So, it's time for me to do a better job of looking to the world around me - I can't be content as long as others are discontent. Maybe you'll join me.

Amen.



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