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[*Introductory video*: Puffy clouds in the sky are the backdrop for the written message ushered in by a streaking star with a shimmering comet-like tail accompanied by gently paced music with a boom-chicka-boom beat:]

WE ALL WANT *to make changes*
SO WE MAKE NEW *year resolutions*
BECAUSE WE THINK WE *will find happiness*
IN ACCOMPLISHING *them*
BUT WHAT IF WE *got this all wrong*
AND YOUR SUCCESS DIDN'T *bring you happiness*
BUT INSTEAD YOUR HAPPINESS *brought you great success?*
HOW WOULD THAT CHANGE *the way you approach life?*
HAPPINESS MATTERS
Find joy even when life hides it

[*When the lights come back up at the video's end, Jones Road Campus Pastor Scott Rodgers begins.*]

All right! Well good morning. I want to welcome everyone that's out at our *Cypress Campus* and those of you joining us online and here at The MET. From Houston, Texas, my name is Scott. So glad to have you with us.

We are in our series called: *Happiness Matters*. As Pastor Sal [Sberna, Lead Pastor] asked me to speak this weekend, I couldn't think, but okay, I'm going to go and I'm going to find what the Bible says about happiness. Does happiness really matter? Does being happy really matter in the eyes of God in our life? I believe that I've discovered some scripture that validates that happiness does matter in our life.

If you have a Bible, you can turn to *Luke, chapter 12*. If it's on your mobile device—maybe you're using YouVersion®; whatever it is—pull that out. It's all right. Text your friends while I talk; it's all good. Just tell them: *Hey, some guy's up there in a short-sleeve shirt. Sounds really good. Get over here at 11:00.* (All right?)

So here's the deal: *Happiness Matters*. I found it in *Luke, chapter 12*. Jesus is speaking and He's teaching a parable. In this parable He begins to say in *verse 16*:

And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop.

Luke 12:16 (NIV, 1984 edition)

So let's pause right there. Now for me and my purpose to internalize this and process this whole parable, I can't just say "a certain rich man"; I had to put a face and a name to him. So I'm going to invite you into my imagination and introduce you to a man named Alfonso. Everybody say: Alfonso.

Alfonso is the character in this parable and think what he looks like. Got it? Okay? Now Alfonso had a good crop. So he was a farmer. He drives a John Deere tractor. He has an International

combine and he's up in corn country. Let's say he's about 18 miles southwest of Sioux City, Iowa. He drinks sweet tea because he's visited the South on vacation. He loves football and he's a *Big Ten* [Conference] fan. All right, now picture him again. That's Alfonso.

All right, let's go. Here we go back into the text.

¹⁶ ...“The ground of a certain rich man {whom Scott named Alfonso } produced a good crop. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, {Hey, Self, Alfonso} ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’

¹⁸ “Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and {all} my goods. ¹⁹ And I’ll say to myself, {—Hey, Alfonso —} “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.” ’

Luke 12:16-19 (NIV, 1984 edition)

If you're taking notes—I've discovered from the Bible itself, the key to happiness—write it down:

1. THE KEY TO HAPPINESS IS BUILDING BIGGER BARNES

Got it? The key to happiness is building bigger barns. Alfonso is in a conundrum: *Oh my goodness, my crop is so plentiful. What am I going to do? I need to tear down what couldn't store them and build something bigger that can store them.*

How many of you guys DVR [digital video record] everything now on TV? You hate commercials like the plague. All right. Now, the only commercials you watch are Super Bowl commercials. (Right?) Other than that it's all: *Ugh!*

So in our house, Shelly and the kids were (at one time) DVRing every episode on the TLC channel of a show called *Extreme Couponing*. Anybody ever watch *Extreme Couponing*? Oh yeah. Now, I'm not saying it's just a lady thing. (All right?) But that show seemed to mostly depict or show ladies who are extreme couponers. Now by a show of hands—confessing your sins one to another—how many of you are considered, in your own consideration, an extreme couponer? Come on, anybody in our midst? Oh, we have a few here. All right. Here we go.

Now *Extreme Couponing*—I don't understand it. (Shelly uses a lot of coupons. She loves to go through the newspapers and all the stuff—go online—find all these coupons.) But these extreme couponers, they go through scenarios into figuring out strategies. It's a very scientific methodology to getting all these coupons. They go to the store (you've seen it) and they bring like three other ladies with them, because they've got to have four or five shopping carts.

- They clear the shelf of every jar of peanut butter they have.
- They get every box of fabric softener they have.

- They get every stick of deodorant that they have in the store.
- They get all this stuff.

(I mean) we're talking enough cereal to feed a third-world country for the rest of the century. They're just loading it up. They finally get to the checkout, and it takes two or three hours just to check them out. They're sweating. They're all stressed: *Is this going to work?* [repeats for emphasis] When the final button is hit, they have \$2,312 worth of merchandise for \$8.17. It's incredible. I don't know how it works, but it does.

They celebrate. They jump up and down. It's like this big victory in life.

- They go put it in the minivan and they take it home.
- They put it in the pantry and the pantry is overloaded.
- [So] they go into the master bedroom closet; fill it up.
- Move the husband's shirts out of there; fill it up...
 - All that fabric softener
 - All that Downy®
 - All that Breeze® (with the special scent)
- They get all the potato chips (for the next century).
- They build and they build—some of them literally even build bigger pantries or another piece on the garage.

Now I don't want to diss on all of the extreme couponers here, so I'll just jump in and say: *As I laugh at that show, it's just not my deal.* But I often look at myself and say:

- *How do I extreme coupon?* (or)
- *How do I personally build bigger barns?*

I mean—

- Is it with a third vehicle?
- Is it (I mean, you know) the kids?—they just need to be connected today. Every kid in my house needs their own iPhone with their own data plan...
 - *I hate you; you have them.*
 - *Our kids want them.*
 - *Stop it! The pressure is getting too much for me.*
 - *Okay? I can't handle that pressure anymore.*
- Is it getting that purse that matches those shoes? (or)
- Is it the shoes that match the jacket?

(For me, you know) we have downstairs in our house (we have) a nice little—ha, little—we have a nice 40-inch, flat-screen, high-def TV that I just—I deserved it one day and I went and got it.

Shelly said: *Go get it.*

I said: *That's right; I deserve it, Honey.*

So I got my high-def TV. It's great. But (you know) we have this room upstairs that is just the right size for this little movie room. So we *had* to get a 50-inch flat screen upstairs. You cannot watch a 50-inch on Blu-ray without surround sound—that is ungodly—you cannot do it. So [I] built the surround-sound system; now it's up there and all the men are saying: *Oh, Jesus, that's the man cave. That is so scriptural.* (I mean) that's just awesome. I'm telling you, it feels good.

But I think about it: If I add them up, I have 90 inches of high-definition television in my house. When I was a kid (showing some age) we had a 19-inch black-and-white, with a [*pantomimes turning the channels using a twist-knob*] TV.

So, to all you extreme couponers, I'm going to lighten up a little bit. However, is it true that the key to happiness is building bigger barns? Or take it to another place: Maybe at its core, the key to happiness lies in one word: *More*. I want more.

- I have all the crops.
- My barns will not hold them.
- I'm going to build bigger barns.

2. THE KEY TO HAPPINESS IS MORE

Here's the deal: I've discovered a definition for this condition. Here's what it says. The definition is: *a restless desire or craving for something one does not have*. It's the definition for the word *discontent*.

Discontent: A restless desire or craving for something one does not have

Now I personally think being discontent...

- Is somewhat energizing
- It's somewhat entertaining because:
 - I love to pursue something I do not have.
 - I love to go after more of what's not in my possession.
 - I love to set my sights on something out there and go for it and do almost whatever it takes—short of sin—to get it in my life.
 - I love sometimes living discontent.

So I've discovered this: The key to happiness is building bigger barns and gathering more.

Now, because I thought this is such a great biblical, life-giving principle, I want to make sure that I use the proper ways of interpreting scripture, the proper laws of interpretation. One of those (some would say) is the *rule of context*.

3. THE RULE OF CONTEXT

So I went back to the text and said: *What's the greater context in which this parable's being taught or being said?* Then (you know) that's kind of how it goes: The tree at the center; okay—

- What's the *verse* say?
- What does the *paragraph* say around it?
- What does the *chapter* around it say?
- What does the *book* say around it?
- What does the *whole of scripture* say around it?

[That's] the rule of context.

So let's go back—*Luke, chapter 12*:

- Alfonso has a great crop.
- His John Deere is going through a lot of fuel to gather this crop.
- He has more than he thought.
- His barns won't hold it.
- He builds bigger barns.

He says: *Hey, I've got so much, I'm going to kick back, take life easy, eat, drink and be merry. All is good.*

Then we go to *verse 20*. Jesus continues and says: "But God said to him..." [Pauses then repeats for congregational response:] "But God said to him..." [Congregational response: "You fool!"] Why does He do that to us?—just when we're (like) gaining some momentum here.

²⁰ "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

²¹ "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

Luke 12:20-21 (NIV, 1984 edition)

Now I don't want to dampen the spirits here, so let's just—just go with me for a moment. Disregard those last two verses that I just read because there was a great atmosphere of expectation—of praise. It felt really good in here before I read those two verses. So let's just put them aside. Let's learn from Alfonso how to live this life of always craving for something that we do not have.

So I'm going to encourage you to write down some very life-changing principles about how to be discontent. If you're ready, get ready to write them down. I'm going to do it really fast, because I want to get you out of here early so you can go run with this and make a difference in your life. Here's the first one:

4. HOW TO BE DISCONTENT:

Write this down.

4(A) WHEN OUR DESIRE IS PLACED ON OBJECTS, WE WILL BE DISCONTENT

Alfonso says in the parable: "What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops." [*Luke 12:17b (NIV)*] You know what?—*I have way more than I can take care of, but...*

- *They're mine.*
- *I need them.*
- *I need to build bigger barns.*

When our desire is placed on objects, we will be discontent. The next thought that I came up with was:

4(B) WHEN OUR WANTS ARE ELEVATED ABOVE OUR NEEDS, WE WILL BE DISCONTENT

“Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and {all} my goods.

Luke 12:18 (NIV, 1984 edition)

When our desire is placed on objects [and] when our wants are elevated above our needs—great steps to living a life of discontent. Here’s my final one:

4(C) WHEN WE ARE THE CENTER OF OUR OWN UNIVERSE, WE WILL BE DISCONTENT

He says:

And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.” ’

Luke 12:19 (NIV, 1984 edition)

Discontent: The restless desire or craving for something one does not have.

- Now if Alfonso inspires you to run down that track and pursue that life of discontent, you have three principles (in which) to build your future on. Run with it and don’t ever look back.
- However, if Alfonso’s track (that he’s going down) doesn’t seem to be getting it for you and inspiring you to go in that direction, I want to introduce you to someone else in scripture. His name is Paul—the apostle Paul.

We’re going to look at his life within the context of the book of *Philippians*. So if you have that, turn to *Philippians, chapter 4*. Let me paint a brief picture of the setting for the book of *Philippians* in the *New Testament*.

Paul—his tone for this letter is...

- Very uplifting
- Very life-giving
- Very encouraging
- Very positive (and)

You could even say, to a point, almost happy. (I mean) Paul has gone *Joel Osteen* on this thing. [*Houston pastor reputed always smiling when speaking.*] He is smiling all the way. He’s lifting it

up. (I mean) it is a very happy, wonderful, encouraging letter. (Okay?) He even says (at times) in it things like:

...my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and {I} long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord...

Philippians 4:1 (NIV, 2011 edition)

In another place he says, "Rejoice in the Lord always." With emphasis he says, "Again I [will] say, rejoice!" [*Philippians 4:4 (KJV)*] So it's a really, really, really uplifting—(I mean) great letter. (I mean) that's the kind of people that I enjoy being around.

But in the midst of this Paul reveals a secret—while the Philippian church is trying to respond to his situation—he reveals the secret that for you and [me] literally can become a game-changer. Here's what he says in *chapter 4*, in *verse 11*. I'm going to pick it up where he says:

¹¹ ...I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. {"I have learned the" what?} I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Philippians 4:11b-13 (NIV, 2011 edition)

Paul (right here) through the inspiration of the Spirit of God, reveals the secret of being content. He has experienced great need. He's experienced great abundance. He says: *No matter what my circumstance is, I've learned the secret of being content in all of it.* He goes on to say in *verse 13: I can do all this through Christ, who gives me strength.*

You'd think with this very, very positive uplifting letter that—here's in my mind what I would picture where he is when he writes this. I imagine—because it's so life-giving, so positive, so encouraging, so happy—literally, he must be...

- Sitting in a lounge chair overlooking an edgeless pool out into the Mediterranean Sea while the sun is setting
- The jazz trio's playing in the background
- He's drinking virgin daiquiris
- Eating sushi wrapped in white rice

And then he's penning these encouraging words to the church in Philippi.

That's just what I imagine—while the waiter comes up with a towel around his forearm and says: *Sir, is there anything else I can get you?* That's what I'm thinking. (I mean) wouldn't you think? With all this (aw, man!): *Rejoice in the Lord! I say it again. Rejoice in all this good stuff! I've learned to be content. I'm good. All is well.* That's the context in which I think he's writing it.

It's not. He's writing this letter from a cold, dark, dingy, probably painful, lonely Roman prison. When I try to chew that I have a hard time swallowing. *Really? Is that really where he's writing this from? And what he's going through?* Pouring out his life in a very (probably) painful way.

And he's encouraging these other people that he's discovered the secret of being content no matter what the circumstance. Wow! That's somebody I want to listen to.

Here're some thoughts out of that, that I want to submit to you to think about and to incorporate into your life. If Alfonso (in pursuing a life of being discontent) is not the track you want to run on, but yet Paul is the one who seems like he's the guy—that's the track that I want to go down—then I've extracted some thoughts from this text that you might want to write down:

5. HOW TO BE CONTENT:

How to live a life of being content—now, here is my first thought:

5(A) WHEN CHRIST IS THE OBJECT OF OUR DESIRE, WE BECOME CONTENT

When it's not our desire placed on objects—but when Christ is the object of our desire, we can become content. He said in *verse 13*:

I can do all this {Do all what?—live this life that's being poured out to God in a very painful situation, living content and being content with it—that's what I can do} through him who gives me strength.

Philippians 4:13 (NIV, 2011 edition)

He says in *verse 13*. Then Jesus said in *Matthew, chapter 6, verse 33*—some of you may recall this—Jesus said:

But {seek what?} seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Matthew 6:33 (NASB)

What "things" is he talking about?—basically food, clothing, and shelter. *Hey, seek first God and He'll take care of the necessities of life.* So, when Christ is the object of our desire—and He's the first object of our desire—living a life of being content is much more achievable than putting our desire on objects.

Now, in this I've (kind of) discovered that contentment is a condition of the heart. Because He said: *...when I've been in great want.* Contentment is not about taking a vow of poverty. In my opinion, that has nothing to do with this. I think it's contextual. The object of his desire is on Christ—

- It's not about being poor.
- It's not about being rich.

—it's about Christ is the focus. He is the center of my life. He knew it...

- When he had nothing.
- When he was rolling in the dough (he was rolling in plenty).

Christ stayed at the place of his desire. Therefore, he could live a life of contentment no matter what was going on around him—the good and the bad and the ugly. When Christ is the object of our desire, then we can become content because it's a condition of our heart.

Here's another thought that I had (is): When our needs are enough, we'll be content.

5(B) WHEN OUR NEEDS ARE ENOUGH, WE BECOME CONTENT

When our needs are enough... *Hebrews, chapter 13, in verse 5*, tells us:

Keep our 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."

Hebrews 13:5 (NIV)

How many of you guys have ever said that to someone else? *Hey, man! God's never going to leave you. He's never going to forsake you.* How many of you have said that before?—probably time and time again. Did you ever realize it was in the context of being content with what's going on in your life? Not in the context of making us rich or always feeling good, but in that context of plenty-or-in-need He'll never leave us; He'll never forsake us. When our needs are enough, we become content.

So here's the deal, realizing that it's contextual. I had a conversation with a few guys this week. We were just talking about this weekend. We felt it was really important just to share the thoughts that—you know what? Being content—

- It's not about taking a vow of poverty.
- It's not about being rich.

The thing is—is that no matter what we have (that)—Christ is the object of our desire and when we have our needs [met], we have enough.

Some of you may be very, very blessed and have **a lot** of stuff. I personally don't think there's anything wrong with that. In fact, (I think) the more that you have the greater opportunity for influence and impact in our culture that you have. So I would say leverage it to the core. If you have nothing, God has still given you something to make a difference with.

So, I would say this: When our needs are enough, we don't need to build bigger barns, we just focus on building better lives. *God, what can I do with what's in my barn? When my needs are met, what can I do to help build a better life for someone else?* That's the question I'm asking myself.

I just had an opportunity a couple weeks ago—I was invited by *Compassion International* to go to Nairobi, Kenya, with a group of pastors from a couple different states to see how they do their deal and how it operates on a daily basis. Shelly and I and the kids—we sponsor through *Compassion*. So it was a great opportunity to see the real deal.

Honestly, before I went my assumption was this: Hey, great organization! Who we sponsor—

- Probably getting some food
- Maybe a church service every now and then (you know, all that stuff)
- Maybe getting exposed to the message of Christ now and then

So okay, that's cool. It's worth it. But I'll tell you what; it was way more than I even imagined. It was incredible. The impact that sponsoring a child has—not only on that child and that family, but—[on] that community. It was just mind-boggling.

This is not a push for *Compassion* but I'm telling you, this is just what I saw. When we were there, I met so many kids and families and the staff running the *Compassion* through the local church. It was just amazing the ripple-effect that was happening. One of a number of young people that I spoke to was a girl named Jerusha.

Jerusha was sponsored through *Compassion* by a family in Canada when she was six years old. She told me this story. It sounds so crazy-cool that if I'm lying, I'm dying. This is the honest-to-God truth—

She says: When I was six years old my dad abandoned our family. (At least she had a father. That's not always the norm.) My dad abandoned my family. I was six years old and my mom and my siblings were left to figure this thing out on our own. That's when I was invited in to that church to be part of the Compassion program. I was in second grade.

She said: I started to go just because I got some food and I was getting some clothing. That's why I went.

She says: Through my sponsors in that program I soon gave my life to Jesus. And my mom started taking these caregiver classes that Compassion was hosting there—in talking about hygiene and clean sanitation and all that stuff and raising their kids.

Which is a different context than you and I and what we have to deal with. Through those classes and the love of the people that were helping her out, she made a decision—her mom—to give her life to Christ.

Jerusha goes on to say that it was through her sponsor in *Compassion* that enabled her to go to secondary school. Now, secondary school is junior high and high school. She says she was the first person in her family line to ever go to secondary school and her sponsors enabled that to happen. Then after she graduated from high school, her sponsor stepped it up quite a bit and sent her through what they call the Leadership Development Program which is training these kids to be Kingdom-minded leaders in leadership principles. It also financed her to go to the University of Nairobi. The tuition there is probably equivalent to (say) Lone Star College in our area—pretty low—but she got a great education. She graduated as a pharmacist. Here's what she said. I took it on video, my little flip-cam, because I was just so blown away.

She said: *Scott, I want to thank my sponsors. Because of all that...* (She retraced all that.) She said: *When I knew I didn't have a dad, I knew I had one in Canada who loved me. He was as close as the letters that he wrote me.*

I'm like: *Okay, stop recording. Are you kidding me?*

Now through that organization—there's a lot like them—sponsoring a child was 38 bucks a month. I spent more eating out Friday and Saturday than that. Now, I don't feel guilty about it, because (you know) thank goodness we have the ability to do both. Thirty-eight bucks—

- Look what she did with it.
- Look what God did with that.

So the question I ask myself and I ask you is: What of our wants did we pay for this week that could have met someone else's need? For hers, it was \$38 a month.

One of the reasons I love the heart of The MET is (like) when we do our *Big Give*, you guys gave **a lot** towards that: investing and building better lives of other people around the world through the partnerships that we have. I love that!

When our needs are enough, we can become content. It's not the context of our barn. Maybe your barn is huge. Maybe your barn is little. But: *Is Christ the object of our desire?* When our needs are met, is our next question:

- Are we going to build a bigger barn for it? (or)
- How am I going to use this to build a better life for someone else?

I think we can really see that Paul's revealing the secret to living a life of being content when Christ is the object of our desire. When my needs are met: *Okay, God, what do You want to use [of] what I have left over?*

Then I think some of you are asking:

- *But what about this, Scott?*
- *Scott, what about that?*
- *Scott, what about tragedy?*
- *How do I be content in the midst of horrible personal tragedy?* (Great question.)
- *How do I be content when I'm exposed to a major catastrophe?*
 - *What do I do?*
 - *Is God (is He) expecting me to live this joyful life of contentment while faced with that reality?*
- *What if I'm living my life with a physical ailment that really makes life uncomfortable? It makes it difficult.*
 - *Does this contentment thing still ring true in that circumstance?*
- What about the stock market going awry and losing 70 percent of your investment portfolio and it's been (like) 10 or more years now and it's still going backwards in a lot of ways?
 - How does contentment relate to that scenario?

I just call them the: What about the what-abouts? If we're honest, we're all asking those questions: *Well, what about this? What about that?* If Christ is the object of my desire and when my needs are enough, what about that stuff?

Here's what I think I got out of this (that I want to share with you) that maybe this speaks louder than the other points or maybe just as loud. And that is this (that):

5(C) WHEN OUR PERSPECTIVE IS ETERNAL, WE BECOME CONTENT

Paul said in *1 Timothy, chapter 6, verse 6*:

But godliness with contentment is great gain.
1 Timothy 6:6 (NIV)

Hmm. Earlier in the book of *Philippians* he said: *Hey, our citizenship is in heaven.* [*Philippians 3:20* (paraphrased)] With all this stuff going on around us, keep in mind that it came to pass.

- It feels like forever right now.
- In the grief of the loss, it feels like it'll never go away.
- It feels like I wake up with a dark cloud around my head and my heart every single day.
 - I'm confused.
 - I'm facing so much uncertainty.
 - I do not know the next steps to take.
 - What am I going to do?

Keep in mind that our citizenship, as followers of Christ, is in heaven.

So, Scott, you're telling me that...

- *Contentment takes away the pain?* Not at all. (Not at all.)
- *Contentment speeds up the grieving process?* I don't know for sure. I would tend to doubt it.
- *Contentment takes away the confusion and the frustration [in] everyday life that comes my way at times?* I think so, but I don't know to what degree.

But what I do know is that contentment gives us hope. It encourages us and helps us to keep our perspective on something eternal. Saying: *Do you know what? There's going to be a day when I'm going to stand before God and the words of the book of Revelation are going to ring true.*

- There is no more sorrow there.
- There is no more tears of pain.
- It's joy.
- It's worship.
- It's praise to God.

It seems like forever right now before that's going to happen. But I speculate that when it happens and God allows us to look back, it's going to seem [*snaps his fingers*] so quick that we're going to stand in His presence and be reunited with those we've grieved over. [It's] a whole different economic system; a whole different way of living for eternity. [*Revelation 21:1-5* (paraphrased)]

I think Paul can say:

- *I know the secret of contentment, because God, through His grace and His strength in me, is enabling me to have a perspective that's eternal. **Christ is the object of my desire.***
- **My needs are enough.** *What am I going to do with my barn? Build bigger and better lives or just better barns?*
- **My perspective is eternal.** *Man! I just have this contentment, this peace and this joy in the midst of this.*

Then comes the reality that Paul said earlier in this book (that): The peace of God that surpasses all understanding [will] guard your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus. [*Philippians 4:7* (paraphrased)] Because we're content with the biblical—the right—things.

When I was processing this message, I threw it out in my *Facebook* community asking for thoughts and input on the topic of contentment. I got a lot of feedback. If that was you, thank you very much. Here are a few of those who gave me thoughts on this topic:

- Matthew Stanart from Edmond, Oklahoma [now Spring, Texas] says in regard to contentment: *It speaks to me in the fact that...I have a bed and food to eat. I am blessed. Getting back to the bareness of everything gets you back to Christ.*
- Susan Dunning from Kingman, Arizona, says: *I, like Paul, have experienced need and being full. [To Scott and Shelly:] You knew me. (Actually my wife Shelly was once a roommate with Susan. She says:) You knew me at a time when I prayed for a loaf of bread and a bag of broccoli would last through the month. (It's true.) Now I am full. (She hooked up with a doctor. She did; she married a doctor. She says:) Now I am full. A difference in circumstance but two things are true. 1) God always provides; people, food, peace, etc. (And then she says:) 2) ... [be] faithful with little..., my tithe and offerings now far exceeds what my income ever was in those times of need when I was crying out to the Lord to provide. (Let this be a lesson to you, young ladies. Hold out for the doctors and the other people in society.)*
- Ann Smith from right here in Cypress, Texas, said: *It reminds me to embrace my current season of life and live with a spirit of contentment.*
- Luke DeMott from Hudsonville, Michigan, replied and said: *To me Paul is explaining what real lasting contentment looks like. For those of us who have lived with both little and much, I think most would agree much feels better. (I agree! It certainly does for me.) But if I'm truly honest, when I look back on my life it is not the amount of money in my checkbook that made me happy. But rather it was the moments where God showed up and did something amazing. (Isn't that good? Then he goes on and says:) My happiest memories are not entries in a checkbook ledger; but rather, they are moments where I got the opportunity to serve God.*

If Christ becomes the object of our affection and when our needs are met, we look to build bigger and better lives and not just bigger barns. When our perspective is eternal, maybe you and I—no matter what our circumstance—can say what Paul ultimately said in *verse 19* of

Philippians 4. This is what he says encouraging them: "My God will meet all your needs." Why does he say that?—because his God has met all his needs.

And my God will meet all your needs according to the richest of his glory in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:19 (NIV, 2011 edition)

We can pursue the track of Alfonso (a life of being discontent) or the life of Paul in being content. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for revealing to us the secret of living a life of contentment. God, a life that's based on the truth of Your Word. It's based on Christ as the object of our desire—our needs being enough and having an eternal perspective. Lord, I pray that You would just really seer this into our heart, Father God.

With our heads bowed and our eyes closed, I want to ask you a real quick question; and that is this: Would you like to pray together that God would help to remove the desire for what you *want* and fill you with a desire for Christ, more than you already have?

If that's your desire: *God, fill me—take away the desire for the wants and the stuff that I may not need and fill me with more of a desire for Christ. As a believer in Christ already, fill me with more desire for Christ.* If that's you, just lift your hand real quick. I want to see who's running with me. Okay, let's pray.

Father, for everyone who's lifting their hand: Lord, I pray that You would—by Your strength and Your grace—help us to remove the desire for the stuff that fills our barns that makes no difference. And, Lord, fill us with the desire to keep Christ at the center of our heart and our life. When You bless us with much or when we face situations of little, we will still be content because You are our focus in all of it.

With our heads bowed, our eyes closed, my last question is this:

- Do you know Christ?—this God that I'm talking about that can literally give us a life...
 - of being content
 - of peace
 - of hope...no matter what the circumstance.
- Do you know Him in a personal way?
 - I want you to think about that, as you (just kind of) take that in a very intimate, personal moment.
- Do you know Christ?
- Do you know the God Who created you?

If you are anything like me, what I wanted and maybe what you want is:

- A life without boundaries

- A life without circumstance
- A life that's absolutely unaccountable to a Creator Who we will stand in front of at some point in the future

I want to live a life...

- Without restrictions
- Complete independence
- No accountability—especially to God.

If that's you, that's where I was and sometimes I slip back in that mode and that's what I want. If that's what you *want*, let me say this to you out of love for you: What you need is a Savior. What you need is someone...

- Who accepts you as you are
- Who forgives you for what you've done
- Who embraces you as a child of God
- Who brings you into His family and gives you the opportunity to live a life of being content as a follower of Christ.

If you do not know Christ, what He did is:

- He died on a cross for you.
- He gave you His life so that you could live a life to follow Him.
- He gave you His life so that you could live a life that's free from the consequence of sin and have the opportunity to step into eternity, at some point, having full peace with God.

That's what He did for you. If you say: *Scott, if that's Who Jesus really is, then that's Who I really want. I want to pray today to ask Jesus into my life. Where I am, Scott, would you lead me in a prayer? I want Christ in my life. I want to know Him if that's really Who He is.*

That's Who He is and I want to invite you to pray: *I want Christ in my life. I want to be a child of God.* With our heads bowed, our eyes closed, if that's you, (you) say: *Scott, Man! I'm in. I want Christ. I'm there. That's where I'm going. I want Him in my life.* If that's you; you're asking Him to be your Savior today, just lift your hand up right now. Be bold. Don't even wait; just shoot your hand up. I want to see who I get to pray for. Come on, man. *I want Christ in my life. I want Him as my Savior. I need Him. Today's the day. I give my life to Him. Today's the day.*

Ma'am, I see your hand right down here in front of me. Who else? *Scott, I want Christ in my life.* I see you right over here to my right—good for you (good for you). *If He's really that good, then I can trust Him.* Ma'am, I see you up here. Praise God for you. Awesome! Who else? Oh, right over here?—oh, yeah! (Thank you, Matt.) Praise God. Yup, right up there. (Gary, thank you. Thank you.) Yeah, got you right up here—top and center.

If that's really Who He is—Scott, if you're not lying—then that's Who I'm giving my life to. Anybody else? *Scott, include me in this prayer.* Another one up here—all right—thank you. Awesome! (Awesome.) Okay, here's what we're going to do. I want to ask everybody to pray this prayer with us out loud—I get the privilege of leading you in a prayer—that says: *Jesus, I give you my life. I give you my heart.* If you raised your hand, I want you to raise your voice right now. As we bow our heads and close our eyes, say this with us (say):

Father God, today I surrender my life to You—everything to You. You are the object of my desire. Please forgive me of my mistakes. Forgive me of my sin.

- Thank You that You love me.
- Thank You that I'm a child of God.
- Jesus, be my Lord and Savior. Thank You...
 - that You died for me
 - that You've risen from the dead
 - that You're the King of all.

Fill me with Your Spirit and help me live for You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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The hopes of the godly result in happiness, but the expectations of the wicked come to nothing.

Proverbs 10:28 (New Living Translation)

Legend:

(words in parentheses) = spoken by the preacher *but unnecessary* to the core sentence idea

[words in square brackets] = additional explanation for clarity *not spoken* by the preacher

{words in curly brackets within indented quote} = spoken explanation *not part of the quote*