

One truth shared: Lasting contentment comes from Christ, our heavenly treasure.

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

1 Timothy 6:6-10,17,19

Serve God With Money; You Can't Serve God and Money

Tom and his mother lived in Asia but got a chance to live in the United States. While he was there, he got connected with a particular Christian church where he and his mother came to faith. But during his time there, one of the leaders in that congregation “prophesied” that in two years after Tom would return to his home country, he’d land a prosperous job, he’d marry a beautiful wife, get a car, buy a big house, and he’d be able to pay for his mother’s medical treatment. This, of course, was immediately met with Tom’s joy and excitement. I mean, who wouldn’t be?

That was *twelve years ago*. Tom still isn’t married. He’s still stuck in a dead-end job that he hates. He’s still living in an apartment. And his mother is still sick. Tom is no longer a Christian. That unfulfilled, empty, audacious promise made by a church leader was the reason he left Christianity behind.

Stories like this certainly highlight the danger of false teachers within the church who preach anything but the Word of God. But there’s another danger this sad story shows—that being the self-inflicted, self-destructive damage caused by the love of money. For Tom, he associated his sense of meaning, purpose, identity, and worth by his employment and how big his salary was. He hinged his hope, joy, and peace on earthly treasures. And his love for those things was so great, it shipwrecked his faith.

So, let’s ask the obvious question posed by our Scripture reading today: Can true, lasting hope, joy, and peace come from earthly treasures? Can I find lasting contentment from material possessions?

Joel Osteen is a prosperity gospel preacher. In a 2012 sermon entitled “The Power of I Am”, he says you can have your best life now. “Feeling old? You can be younger! Feeling weak? You can be stronger! Feeling poor? You can be rich! It all starts with *you!* God is ready to give you what you want!” You want to guess how many times that sermon referenced the name “Jesus”? A grand total of *zero* times. Yet it’s the most popular sermon on the internet. In a society saturated in materialism and consumerism, such sermons cash in on peoples’ love of earthly treasure—a lie that says true meaning and purpose, joy, peace, and happiness rest in material wealth. Meanwhile, God invariably is reduced to nothing but a resource, a big sugar daddy in the sky, a means to *my* end—a divine vending machine.

While the love of money comes in many forms, at its heart is a lie—a lie that challenges the definition of “enough,” a lie that gets us hung up on what the word “need” means, a lie that not only confuses what we “need” with what we “want” but a lie that leaves us forgetful of the greatest need we all have, a need that threatened our eternal standing with God, a need our money can’t meet—the need to be rescued from sin and be reconciled to God.

But in Christ, that need has been met! That is why Paul says to Timothy, “But godliness *with contentment* is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.” Your God *can* and *will* provide for your earthly needs. But he’s given you something far greater than money, a great job, a nice house, and a full fridge. He’s given you far more than your friends and family and your gifts and talents: God has given you the gift of himself. Jesus would take on flesh to die for the sins of that world—including our sins of loving money, all to win for us eternal life with him in heaven. Through Jesus, we have the gift of eternal life! Your God has conquered sin, death and the devil for you! We are heirs of eternal life in the glorious riches of heaven.

You see, earthly contentment doesn’t come from earthly treasures. That you and I can be content is entirely because of the heavenly treasures we already have in Jesus. He’s given hope for the hopeless, peace for the broken, comfort for the guilt-ridden, rest for the weary, strength for the weak, and joy for the heartbroken. You and I can be “rich in good deeds” and “rich in generosity,” not to earn heaven, but because, through faith in Christ, it’s already yours! Through faith in Christ, you are already rich!.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for giving us house and clothing, friends and family, food and drink, our mind and all our abilities. We especially thank you for meeting our greatest needs in your Son. Move us to treasure your gracious words of promise and be content in all circumstances. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Foundations Teen Facilitators Guide

Year C – Proper 20

Hard Truth

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Serve God With Money; You Can’t Serve God and Money

Starting the Discussion: *This first section is intended to be light and easy, to engage and get the conversation going. Have a little fun with these questions.*

- What do you want your family to get you this Christmas? Or for your next birthday?
- What things do you feel you really need right now?
- What’s the difference between things we need and the things we want?
- Do you find yourself thinking more about the things you need or the things you want?

Connecting: *This section serves as a bridge between the opening conversation and the body of the study/discussion. It should get the group thinking about the topic/text even before they’ve looked at it.*

- What happens when we confuse the things we want for the things we need? (i.e., “needing” designer clothes vs. needing clothes; “needing” a Ferrari vs. needing a car)
- In your own words, what does it mean to be content?

Digging In: Here we want to dig into some texts or the text for the day and see what Scripture says. The questions are meant to be open ended to give a beginning of a scriptural conversation. These are a guide for a spiritual and scriptural conversation.

- This section of Scripture draws a firm line between heavenly treasures and earthly treasures—between eternal things and temporary things. Why might this distinction be important for us to keep in mind?
- If it's true that "Life isn't all about the hustle," why do we still get swept up into the hustle?
- A lot of people think the Bible says that "Money is the root of all evil." But, as we saw in our reading from 1 Timothy, the Bible actually says, "the *love* of money is the root of all kinds of evil." What's the difference?
- In what ways is the love of money self-destructive?

Conclusion: Here we want to wrap up the discussion, perhaps circling back to the "connecting question" above.

- How can we, as Christians, be content with just "food and clothing"?
- Our greatest need was forgiveness of sins, newness of life, and salvation; in Christ, that need has been met. And if God, in Christ, has met our greatest need, how does that result in our contentment?