

SUNDAY ARTICLE

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The Secret to Being Content with Your Bank Balance

John Piper

Over the years, it has struck me as strange how many Christians pursue wealth.

Jesus warns that riches make it hard for people to get into heaven (Matthew 19:23) and Paul warns that those who desire to be rich plunge into ruin and destruction (1 Timothy 6:9-10).

It's as though we either don't believe it, or we think we'll be the exception to the rule, or we just don't think God's Word could mean what it says.

But Paul means what he says – desiring to be rich is deadly. And there's more. The key that unlocks this section of 1 Timothy 6 are these words: "Godliness with contentment is great gain" (verse 6).

What's the protection against these deadly effects of money?

Answer: a heart content in God.

Are you deeply satisfied in God, so that this satisfaction – this contentment – doesn't collapse when God ordains you have much or little?

Having little can destroy contentment in God by making us feel he's stingy or uncaring or powerless. And having much can destroy our contentment in God by making us feel he is superfluous, or quite secondary as a helper and treasure.

What's the Secret?

It's no small thing to learn how not to lose our contentment in God. This is what life is for – living to show that he is all-glorious. And this is shown, among other ways, by how he's gloriously sufficient to give us contentment in himself in the best and worst of times. Paul had learned the secret of how to do that:

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)

Paul had learned "to be content." This is the key to the right use of money in 1 Timothy 6:5-10. "I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need" (Philippians 4:12). What was the secret? I think he gives it in the previous chapter: "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8).

In other words, to put it in modern terms, when the stock market goes up or he gets a bonus, he says, "I find Jesus more precious and valuable and satisfying than my increasing money." And when the stock market goes down or he faces a pay cut, he says, "I find Jesus more precious and valuable and satisfying than all that I have lost." The glory and beauty and worth and preciousness of Christ is the secret of contentment that keeps money from controlling him.

Money Doesn't Satisfy. Really.

Money doesn't satisfy: "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 5:10). I know many will say, "Oh yes it does. My money is a good friend. It doesn't let me down. I have a great house, and two cars, and a fine private school for my kids, and a boat, and a cabin, and lots of life insurance, and pensions and annuities. It may not go with me to the other world – if there is another world – but it definitely hasn't let me down here!"

God is gloriously sufficient to give us contentment in himself.

Really?

I will place my bet with the Preacher of Ecclesiastes. You were made for satisfaction with God, and your money is blinding you to that purpose. You have deep longings. They rise up in the night. They creep up on you when you're alone and discouraged.



If you're honest, you know the stuff you've surrounded yourself with cannot touch the deepest longings of your heart. You weren't made to be satisfied with stuff. And none of that stuff can still the fears – and the onrush – of aging and death. No, you're kidding yourself. The word is true: "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money."

George MacDonald penetrated to the reason that our elusive quest to find happiness in having stuff does not work:

The heart of man cannot hoard. His brain or his hand may gather into its box and hoard, but the moment the thing has passed into the box, the heart has lost it and is hungry again. If a man would have [anything], it is the Giver he must have...Therefore all that he makes must be free to come and go through the heart

of his child; he can enjoy it only as it passes, can enjoy only its life, its soul, its vision, its meaning, not itself.

There is no link between having much money and knowing much happiness in this life – or the next. When the biblically wise man says "Better is..." he means "More deep contentment is..."

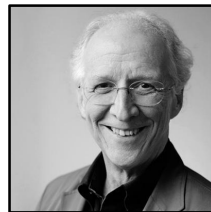
Better is the little that the righteous has than the abundance of many wicked (Psalm 37:16).

Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble with it. (Proverbs 15:16).

Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fattened ox and hatred with it. (Proverbs 15:17).

In other words, the key to happiness in this life isn't wealth. You cannot find happiness in something that blinds you to the true source of happiness. Jesus repeatedly portrayed himself and his promises and his kingdom – now and forever – as a relationship and a hope and a place of supreme happiness.

Don't settle for something less.



John Piper is founder and teacher of desiringgod.org and chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

*This is an adapted excerpt from John Piper's new book, **Living in the Light: Money, Sex, and Power** (The Good Book Company, 2016).*

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