

# “Content and Generous”

*1 Timothy 6 6-11, 17-19 & Luke 16 19-31*

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**Prayer for Understanding** God never let our reason distort your truth. Holy Spirit inspire us and reveal your will to each of us. Amen

What do you think of the statement? “Spiritual freedom is a life set free from desire, being content with what we have, instead of ceaselessly strive for more.”

The Apostle Paul warns that “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.” Discontentment can imprison one in selfishness, a striving for more and more stuff while becoming indifferent to the needs of others. Often this is accompanied by a growing sense of fear that one’s stuff will run out, fear that if I share there will not be enough, fear that other people are trying to take my stuff. Love of money often causes one to see the world through a lens of scarcity rather than abundance.

The story is told of a starving person who was given a piece of bread, but no sauce to put on it. Hoping to get something to go with his bread, he went to a nearby inn and asked for a handout. The innkeeper turned him away with nothing, but the beggar sneaked into the kitchen where he saw a large pot of soup cooking over the fire. He held his piece of bread over the steaming pot, hoping to capture a bit of flavor from the good-smelling vapor. Suddenly the innkeeper seized him by the arm and accused him of stealing soup. “I took no soup,” said the beggar. “I was only smelling the vapor.” “Then you must pay for the smell,” answered the innkeeper. The poor beggar had no money, so the angry innkeeper dragged him before the court. The judge said. “So, you demand payment for the smell of your soup?” “Yes!” insisted the innkeeper. “Then I myself will pay you,” said the judge, “and I will pay for the smell of your soup with the sound of money.” The judge drew two coins from her pocket, rang them together loudly, put them back into her pocket, and sent the beggar and the innkeeper each on their way.

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.” What else but the love of money can explain why the greedy innkeeper would want to charge a starving person for the smell of soup!

The Apostle Paul writes: **1 Timothy 6:6-11, 17-19 NRSV** “Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains. But as for you, person of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance, gentleness. As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.”

In summary, be content, compassionate, and generous. This raises the questions: What are the bare essentials? With how little can one be content? In *The Jungle Book*, Baloo the bear sings: “Look for the bare necessities. The simple bare necessities. Forget about your worries and your strife. Wherever I wander, wherever I roam. I couldn’t be fonder of my home.”

Work for the bare necessities, be content and give away the surplus. Compassion protects one from lust to keep more than we need. Paul urges us to “pursue righteousness and love.” Righteousness is being in right relationships with all people. Some of the aspects of right relationships are, seeing each person as your beloved sibling, valuing all people as equal, sharing so all have enough. God’s covenant with Abraham and Sarah was that they would be blessed to bless all people. They were considered righteous when they strived to share God’s blessings with all people.

We live in a culture of outrage and discontent. Advertisements, comparisons, social media, scream at us to be discontent, fearful, and seek to shift our wants into needs.

The story is told of a wealth manager who was at the pier of a small coastal village when a small boat with one fisherman docked. Inside the small boat were several large yellowfin tuna. The wealth manager complimented the fisherman on the quality of his fish and asked how long it took to catch them. He replied, “only a little while.” The

wealth manager then asked why didn't you stay out longer and catch more fish? The fisherman said he was content for had enough to support his family's immediate needs. The wealth manager then asked, "but what do you do with the rest of your time?" The fisherman said, "I sleep late, fish a little, play with my children, go for walks with my wife, and stroll into the village each evening where I sip wine, and play guitar with my friends. I have a full, joyful life." The wealth manager scoffed. "I can help you. "You should spend more time fishing, and with the proceeds, buy a bigger boat. With the proceeds from the bigger boat, you could buy several boats, and eventually you would have a fleet of fishing boats. Instead of selling your catch to a middleman, you could sell directly to the processor, eventually opening up your own cannery. You could control the product, processing, and distribution. Of course, you will need to leave this small coastal fishing village and move to New York City, where you will run your expanding enterprise." The fisherman asked, "But, how long will this all take?" To which the wealth manager replied, "15 to 20 years or so." "What then?" asked the fisherman. The wealth manager said, "That is the best part. When the time is right, you can sell your company and become rich. You will make millions!" The fisherman asked. "then what?" The wealth manager replied. "Then you can retire. Move to a small coastal fishing village where you can sleep late, fish a little, play with your children, go for walks with your wife, and stroll into the village each evening where you can sip wine, and play guitar with your friends."

You may already be rich by worldly standards. If you made \$1,500 last year, you are in the top 20 percent of the world's income earners. If you have sufficient food, decent clothes, live in a house or apartment, and have a reasonably reliable means of transportation, you are among the top 15 percent of the world's wealthy. Have \$61,000 in assets? You are among the richest 10 percent of the adults in the world. If you have any money saved, a hobby that requires some equipment or supplies, a variety of clothes in your closet, two cars and live in your own home, you are in the top 5 percent of the world's wealthy. If you have more than \$500,000 in assets, you are part of the richest 1 percent of the world.

Decide what you truly need, be content and give away the rest.

The stories we tell are vitally important. The stories we tell ourselves, in our thoughts shape us as a person. Our stories have a tremendous influence on our ability to love.

In Jesus' day, most of the stories about the poor sprang from a belief that the poor, were poor because they were sinful, they lacked something. These stories were so widespread and ingrained into everyone that even the disciples after witnessing Jesus heal the poor and listening to Jesus teach to have compassion for the poor asked this question. **John 9:1-3 NLT "As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. "Rabbi," his disciples asked Jesus, "why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents' sins?" Jesus answered, "It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins." The message puts it this way. John 9:1-3 "Jesus saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked, "Rabbi, who sinned: this man or his parents, causing him to be born blind?" Jesus said, "You are asking the wrong question. You are looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do. We need to be energetically at work for God who sent me here, working while the sun shines."**

Today, many people believe that these stories are absurd, that someone is sick, or poor, or that calamity happened to someone, due to how loving they are, how many sins they commit. However, I still hear a lot of stories that have their roots in these old stories that the poor are poor because they are lazy. Jesus said this is flat out wrong.

It is in this context that Jesus gave the disciples, and us, a different story about the poor. It is a shocking story of reversal. Listen and search yourself. What kind of stories are you telling about the poor? Do you listen to the stories of the poor. Try not to get distract by notions of heaven and hell. John Shea wrote: "Jesus told stories of heaven and hell. Although they take place in the afterlife, these stories are not meant to convey information about the world beyond death. Their real target is the **assumptions** and **attitudes** of this world. In these stories the afterlife is often portrayed as a "fixed" place. The purpose of this "fixity" is that it provides a focus on something essential that is not easily grasped in the flow of time. In this way the stories of heaven and hell make clear truths that are murky and ambiguous in the earthly realm"

Listen for Jesus teaching about assumptions and attitudes in his story. **Luke 16:19-31 NLT "Jesus said, "There was a certain rich man who was splendidly clothed in purple and fine linen and who lived each day in luxury. At his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus who was covered with sores. As Lazarus lay there longing for scraps from the rich man's table, the dogs would come and lick his open sores. "Finally, the poor man died and was carried by the angels to sit beside Abraham at the heavenly banquet. The rich man also died and was buried, and he went to the place of the dead. There, in torment, he saw Abraham in the far distance with Lazarus at his side. "The rich man shouted, 'Father Abraham, have some pity! Send Lazarus over here to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue. I am in anguish in these flames.' "But Abraham said to him,**

**‘Son, remember that during your lifetime you had everything you wanted, and Lazarus had nothing. So now he is here being comforted, and you are in anguish. And besides, there is a great chasm separating us. No one can cross over to you from here, and no one can cross over to us from there.’ “Then the rich man said, ‘Please, Father Abraham, at least send him to my father’s home. For I have five brothers, and I want him to warn them so they don’t end up in this place of torment.’ “But Abraham said, ‘Moses and the prophets have warned them. Your brothers can read what they wrote.’ “The rich man replied, ‘No, Father Abraham! But if someone is sent to them from the dead, then they will repent of their sins and turn to God.’ “But Abraham said, ‘If they won’t listen to Moses and the prophets, they won’t be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’”**

The poor man was immediately carried by the angels to heaven. Lazarus did not need to confess any sins. Lazarus was not lacking anything. Lazarus was of equal value to every person in the cosmos. Lazarus did not need to do or be anything different than who he was. The poor are equally loved by God and saved by God’s grace. The listeners in Jesus’ day would have expected this poor man to be eaten by the dogs for only the rich, the righteous, deserved a proper burial.

There is no indication that the unnamed rich man was dishonest, or greedy, merely indifferent to the plight of the poor. He did not notice the poor, listen to the poor, or invite the poor in to have dinner with him. He lacked compassion. Often if there is an unnamed person in the story Jesus wants you to understand how you are like this unnamed person.

The second rich man in this story is Abraham. An extremely wealthy man Abraham was compassionate and provided hospitality to all. No poor man would lay unattended at Abraham’s door. Time and time again, Abraham opened the door, washed, clothed, and enjoyed dinner with the poor. Abraham was blessed to be a blessing for all people. Abraham was extravagantly compassionate. The listeners in Jesus’ day would realize that Lazarus at the bosom of Abraham is a sign that he belongs as an equal to the family of God.

It is striking that this unnamed rich man in his reversed situation still has no compassion for Lazarus. He does not apologize, or ask for another chance. He does not even ask to be carried to Abraham to join Lazarus at the banquet. Instead, he asks Lazarus to serve him, to come to his place, to make his situation comfortable. He still views himself as superior to Lazarus. The love of money made this unnamed man oblivious to the plight of others. The love of money smothered his compassion. The love of money restricted his love. The great chasm is the unnamed man’s void of compassion.

Abraham reminds the rich man of his lack of compassion for Lazarus. He still does not see his selfishness, his lack of compassion, his equality with Lazarus. The only compassion he can muster is for his five brothers. Please send someone to warn them. But they already have been warned because scripture, the prophets, Jesus all command us to have compassion for the poor and love all people.

Another important detail of this story is the gate. The rich man built a wall to keep others out, to protect his stuff, to limit his sharing. He built a wall so he would not be able to hear the stories of the poor, so he could be indifferent to the poor, so he would not see the poor. He isolated himself. He listened to only the stories of the rich. Sort of like, how our online browsing today feeds us similar stories so we will browse longer, seeing more ads, chase more stuff and skewing our perception of reality. And still there was a gate. Gates are often locked from the inside, or the owner has a key, so there is always a way for those who lack compassion to unlock the gate, to invite in the poor, to hear their stories and grow their compassion and generosity.

The way of the world is not God’s way. The beliefs that perceive earthly riches as a sign of God’s blessing and conversely earthly poverty, and sickness, as a sign of God’s displeasure are mistaken. Anyone who views a poor person as somehow less than another is mistaken. Anyone who defends inequality is mistaken. God is working through us to redistribute the goods of the earth so all people share equally. God wants to do this through your contentment, compassion, and generosity.

The listeners in Jesus’ day would have known that everything in their history urged them to welcome the poor and exploited, to be a blessing to everyone. The problem is not that most people do not know they are to be compassionate and generous to the poor. The real problem is most people know and some choose to not care. Some people choose to harden their heart, isolated themselves, make up stories that justify their behavior. Some people choose to love money more than people.

When you are pondering giving money the story you tell yourself is vital. Is it a story of how much you are giving up, how you should have more? These types of stories will likely produce negative emotions and limit your compassion and generosity. Or is it a story about how the money will help another? These types of stories will likely produce positive emotions and expand your compassion and generosity. This will inspire you to give with excitement, anticipation, and joy.

Research is discovering that to intentionally hurt someone you first need to turn off your compassion, to view them as less than you, often this happens at the subconscious level. Compassion and equality are smothered by negative stories. We can make our subconscious more compassionate through our positive, affirming, welcoming stories of the poor. We become more compassionate by noticing the poor, listening to their plight, hearing their stories, being in relationships with the poor, filled with respect, dignity, and hope. We become more compassionate by seeing everyone as our equal, that giving is an opportunity to partner with another, to be with our sibling, to discover more about love and God through each other.

People who were so poor they did not have adequate shelter and often no food were asked, would they rather have community or their basic needs provided. They overwhelmingly answered community.

Jessica Jackley a person of great compassion who gives by providing microloans to the poor said. “The best way to be inspired is to listen to another’s story. The more I listen the more I see the potential for me to help. Each one of us can do amazing things. That makes our stories into love stories and into a collective love story that continually perpetuates hope, good things for all of us, that changes the world, which will make tomorrow better than today.”

Be content, compassionate, and generous. Amen