

## **Lesson on Contentment and Focusing on What We Have Been Given**

Welcome back to Session Four

Purpose:

1. Schemers seek to zone in on ways we are discontented or dissatisfied.
2. There are many ways we are needy or vulnerable which we might not recognize.
3. We ourselves become our own problem when we allow our need for having more of something to begin to take over our lives and allow evil to enter.
4. Jesus understands very well how our natural sinful human nature will lead us to lose or waste the one human life we have been given.

This second tool might surprise you. It did for me when I first considered it. It does not appear at first glance to be something that will keep a person safe or believing in Jesus. Let's give this tool a chance to show us its value.

The tool is this: Being content, not waiting for someone to give one a better life, not having to have more, but rather be satisfied, cool, at rest, not driven. Why is this tool so important and beneficial? It is a matter of what a person is focused on. What are they giving their attention to? One of the reasons people get in trouble and go down the wrong path is they are dis-contented. They have a strong need for something good to happen. Maybe they do not realize they have that need. But those who want to take advantage of them are aware there is a need there. If connivers can find it, they will exploit it.

If we ask the question: "Are we not all discontented, discouraged at sometimes in our lives?" Surely. "Are we not ready to grumble about something or someone on one day or another?" We know we are. All that makes us vulnerable. It indicates we are needy, another word for vulnerability. Manipulators and false prophets are experts when it comes to using our own needs, our own complaints to undermine us, to redirect us and control us. So, we have to be fully aware, this can set us up to be ensnared in something destructive..

It is important that you have some clarity on the needs, often unspoken, that people have. Many of these needs are more obvious to an outsider or schemer than they are to the person themselves. Let's look at a few of them: The need to be accepted, the need for attention, the need to try something risky like gambling, the need to feel loved or treasured. There is the need to be honored, to have an adventure, to be recognized, to not be embarrassed, to get by with something, to be popular, to be favored, to have lots of money.

*Discussion Questions: We have identified some of the inner needs people have. Name others you might think of or pick out one that strikes you as you look at the ones listed? Why might a person who has a strong need not recognize it for themselves? If you were a conniver and you wanted to take advantage of someone who has a need to look good, how might you approach them? If you discovered someone with a strong desire to have be part of the in-crowd, how might you approach them? What do you think*



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*it would take to notice that someone is saying something, not because they care about a person but because they know this person has a need and they are cleverly speaking to that so as to gain more control over them? Name an ad that shows what we are talking about.*

Jesus was very aware that we human beings have a problem. That problem is dissatisfaction, discontent, needing something more. In Luke 12:13-21 Jesus is confronted by a man who makes this request, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." Now it is true that according to Jewish custom one brother, for example, could demand that the estate be divided among all of them. He wants Jesus to aid him in making that happen. Jesus responds with a question, "Who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" Then he warns the man, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of one's possessions." Then Jesus goes on to tell a parable, showing what he means.

"The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'You have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So, it is for those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God."

*Discussion Questions: What need did the man have who approached Jesus and wanted his help? By approaching Jesus with this matter, what does this show that his desire was very important to him? Explain what you think Jesus means when he says, Life does not consist in the abundance of one's possessions." What seems to be the goal of the rich landowner with abundant crops? If that is how he saw his future life, how does that differ from the way God saw his life? What do you think it means: "rich towards God"? What inner need was driving this rich landowner? How was this directing his life in the wrong direction?*

In the first course, we talked about callings we have from God. The calling to be a wife, a husband, a father, a mother, a child and a grandparent. These callings God give us ask us to focus on the needs of others. To do that we are also asked to care for ourselves to the point that we are able to serve others. In this lesson we are beginning to see how our own needs for something begin to take over our lives and then can cause us to not take seriously the lives of others. That is a problem of our human sinful nature. Our own desires can begin to consume us.

We can become driven. Paul addresses this in I Timothy 6:6-10. Here he gets down to the basics. In the long run we will be well off realizing we brought nothing into the world, and we are going to take nothing along with us when we die. So being content with what we have is going to gain us more than being in the constant desire to have even more. This is the passage where having money is not the problem, but the love of money and desiring more is. Why? Because that desire pulls us down a never-ending road that can take over our lives. The desire for something more can lead us into a greedy or lustful lifestyle causing us to put aside our faith and not focus on God's gifts.



What we are discovering here is something the Bible talks about often. The serpent sees that Adam and Eve have a need to know why they shouldn't eat of tree of good and evil. That perks their interest. Then he deceives them by saying God is lying to them because he does not want them to be like him. They buy his lie. They want to be like God. Moses realizes the people of Israel, when they enter the promise land, will be attracted to idol worship where men can go to temple prostitutes with the promise this will help their crops be more productive. This will tempt them to want to check this out. Having sex will fulfill their need for more pleasure.

Peter wanted to show Jesus that by his own will power he could be loyal to Jesus even if it meant him being killed. He has a need to parade his loyalty before others. Is it not interesting that none of what these people wanted or planned worked out? Their belief that they could handle their lives on their own and not pay attention to or look to God never panned out.

*Discussion Questions: What do you think is going on when we have little time to fulfill our callings from God because we are too busy and too distracted? Can you give some examples of how the love for more money has redirected people lives and become their primary goal? What is happening in America such that it is easy for parenting and grandparenting to get sidetracked? Why do you think it is that neither society or even churches seldom talk about the value of parents and grandparents have in making our nation's strong?*

Jesus addresses this need to follow our own desires. He says in Matthew 16:25a, "For those who want to save their lives will lose it." In verse 26 he makes this plain, "For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?" If we have been given one life to live on this earth, do we want to fritter it away trying to reach some goals that in the end have no value.

Martin Luther speaks to this in his Small Catechism. He shares the meaning of the Lord's Prayer, sixth petition—"Save us from the time of trial". This is what he says, "It is true God tempts no one, but we ask in this prayer that God would preserve and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair and other great and shameful sins and that, although we may be attacked by them, we may finally prevail and gain the victory".

*Discussion Questions: How does Jesus' statement, "For those who want to save their life will lose it," fit into this lesson? Since we have only one life to live on this earth, do we need to hear so we don't waste chasing after what will be nothing in the end? Explain what you think Luther is talking about that seeking to undermine our own lives are three enemies: the devil, the world, and our own flesh?*

Summary:

1. One important tool for keeping a person safe and following Jesus is to not let one's discontent become the opening for schemers to entrap a person.
2. Even though we do not often talk about hidden needs people have, those needs can produce a sense of dissatisfaction that can become dangerous for one's life.



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3. Jesus sees our lives very differently than the usual thinking of humans who are much influenced by their own needs and popular culture.
4. Martin Luther tells us how in spite of the fact that the devil, the world and our own fleshly desires would mislead us, because of Christ we can prevail

Memory Verse: Matthew 16:26 For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

Other verses to consider: I Timothy 6:6-7 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.

Hebrews 13:5: "Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you.""

Matthew 6:33: "But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

Matthew 6:25-26: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food; and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they do neither sow or nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"