

Ancient Advice for a Modern World: Experiencing Contentment

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1 Timothy 6:6-19

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As I considered our reading for today from Timothy,

- I found myself thinking about a song I used to listen to entitled,

- “If I had a Million Dollars”.

- The song must have been written

- when the band was still struggling to have a hit,

- because as I listened to it again, - -

- it was obvious that they were imagining what they would do

- if they actually had a million dollars to spend.

- They sing about buying a house and furniture.

- They sing about buying a car and nice clothes.

- They even sing about having an abundance of

- the foods they enjoy most.

- After they have gone through everything they would buy,

- the song ends with the words,

- “If I had a million dollars,

- I’d be rich.”

- Now this band

- certainly wasn’t the first group of people

- to consider what they would do with a million dollars.

- I imagine all of us

- at one time or another

- have spent a little daydreaming time

- imagining what we would do,

- if we were suddenly given

- millions of dollars to spend.

- I'm sure there are times,

- when all of us have thought - -

'If I just had more money,

- this problem or that problem would go away.'

- 'If I just had more money,

- I'd be able to help people.'

- 'If I just more money,

- I'd be happy. I'd be content.'

- What we hear in Timothy today,

- is a clear reminder

- that the love of money,

- the desire to accumulate more and more wealthy - -

- even having wealth itself,

- is not a way to happiness,

- but in fact can have the opposite effect.

- Pursuing all the stuff,
 - that the world encourages us to accumulate, - -
 - may bring a moment of joy,
 - but that moment will fade.
- Stuff -
 - wealth -
 - doesn't make you truly happy.
- It's like the research I was reading this week on lottery winners.
 - According to a 2002 study out of the University of California,
 - Within eight weeks of winning a lottery,
 - most people had returned to the level of happiness they had
 - before the event.

<http://answers.google.com/answers/main?cmd=threadview&id=141224>)

- In other words,
 - the money doesn't really change anything.
 - The newly available financial resources
 - may pay a few bills,
 - and allow for a few nice things to be purchased,
 - but it can't change who you are,
 - more likely,
 - the money will only magnify,
 - the positive or negative aspects of your life.

Dr. Roy Kaplin,

- an author of several books on lottery winners found in his research that - -

“You can catapult people from one economic status to another overnight,

- but a lifetime of beliefs and experiences change more slowly.

- People who were outgoing and gregarious before winning took it in stride,

- People who were shy and withdrawn before winning

- became suspicious and paranoid.”

- Or as Kennon Sheldon, a psychologist at the University of Missouri said,

“Money doesn't change a person's level of happiness.

- We consistently find that people who say money is most important to them

- are (the unhappiest).”

<http://answers.google.com/answers/main?cmd=threadview&id=141224>

- Which of course,

- is basically what the author of Timothy

- is saying to us this morning.

“The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil”

(1 Timothy 6:10)

- Loving money,

- not only won't make you happy,

- but in all likelihood, it will lead off in the wrong direction.

- So since it's clear,

- that the avenue to happiness and contentment, - -

- which is so heavily promoted
 - by the world around us, - -
 - is a dead-end street,
 - then what path should we follow
 - to discover a whole, healthy life.

- Not surprisingly,

- the author of Timothy

- has a few good ideas.

- He suggests that the way forward

- that leads to a whole, healthy life - - -

- the way forward

- that leads to a life of contentment - - -

- the way forward

- that leads to true, eternal riches

- is a life built upon a relationship with God.

- “There is great gain,”

- the author says,

“in godliness combined with contentment.” (1 Timothy 6:6)

- He suggests that as children of God,

- we are called not to pursue wealth,

- simply for the sake of excess and greed,

- but rather we should “pursue righteousness,

- godliness,
- faith,
- love,
- endurance and gentleness.”

(1 Timothy 6:11)

- As Children of God,
 - we focus our lives on the good news
 - that Jesus lived, died and rose
 - to repair the brokenness in our relationship with God,
 - instead of focusing our lives on the size of our bank account
 - or the number of toys we have.
- As children of God,
 - we are called to allow this good news that comes to us in Jesus Christ,
 - to be the guiding principle for our lives
 - for how we look at the world,
 - and for how we set our priorities.
- So for example while some people may focus their lives
 - on trying to acquire enough money to build a 20,000 square foot mansion,
 - as children of God,
 - we give thanks for the home we have
 - and focus our lives on trying to help people
 - who have no where to live.

- That's what Lutherans and countless other people of faith
 - are still trying to do in Slidell, Louisiana
 - and in countless other places effected by natural disasters.
- While some people
 - may be willing to step on a few toes,
 - bend the truth,
 - and steal a coworker's idea
 - in order to get ahead at work,
 - as children of God,
 - we strive to use our gifts and talents
 - in a ways that respect the gifts of others
 - and ultimately allow the whole community to be built up.
- That's why Lutherans and countless other people of faith
 - have traditionally worked for fair working conditions and wages
 - for the poor and the powerless.
- While some people
 - hoard all the gifts they are given,
 - believing that somehow
 - a few more zeros on their net worth
 - will solve their problems,
 - as children of god,
 - we strive to be good stewards of our gifts,

- to use them wisely to meet our needs
 - and the needs of our families - -
- while at the same time,
 - giving generously to help others
 - in a way that reflects
 - the generosity God has shown us.
- That's why,
 - we collect school supplies for kids in need,
 - why we send Christmas shoe boxes to children on an Indian Reservation
 - why we provide a Thanksgiving meal for the community
 - and why we undertake all the other outreach ministries of this congregation
 - that provide help and hope in the world.

For as Timothy notes,

- as children of God,
 - we are called not to set our "hopes on the uncertainty of riches,
 - but rather on God
 - who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment."
- We are called
 - "to do good, to be rich in good works, generous and ready to share
 - . . . so that they may take hold of the life that really is life."

(1 Timothy 6:17-18)

- We live in a time of abundance.

- We live in a time of multi-tasking and divided focus.
 - We live in a time of confusing and searching.
 - It's easy to lose our way.
 - It's easy to follow the path that is most loudly promoted,
- but what the author of Timothy knew a long, long time ago,
 - what most of us are discovering in the world today,
 - is that contentment, happiness, joy, fulfillment
 - all the things that people are searching for
 - are not going to be found
 - through the paths promoted by the world,
 - are not going to be found
 - by accumulating a huge bank account
 - or a mansion full of toys,
 - but rather
 - come through our relationship with God.

For when we know God loves us and Jesus came to give us the promise of eternal life,

- when we let our faith in God shape our words and deeds,
 - when we pursue faith, love and gentleness,
 - and when we share generously of our resources,
- then we discover
 - the good news
 - that we are truly rich

- in ways that not even one million dollars
- could bring.
- We discover
- that with God's help,
- we are on our way to building
- whole healthy lives
- in the midst of our imperfect world.
- And hopefully we discover - -
- as sense of contentment and peace
- that comes from knowing the love of God
- is always present in our lives.