

1 TIMOTHY
Part Eight: Chapter 6
Pastor Svea Merry March 16–17, 2024

When you travel somewhere, are you a light packer or a heavy packer? Are you someone who plans out exactly what you will wear, even strategically figuring out which items of clothing could do double duty, so you can limit the load you're bringing with you, or do you grab a big suitcase and fill it with everything you think you might need and then a few extra things just in case, because you never know?

I had a travel day a while ago that was made quite difficult when the wheel on the bottom of my suitcase broke, and suddenly, the luggage that wasn't that big of a deal to lug behind me became a massive pain to have to carry. Carrying it through the airport and all the way to my hotel left me sweaty and exhausted, even giving me a backache for a couple of days, which took away some of the joy of my trip. I sure was kicking myself for packing those extra boots and books!

We may not think about the weight of the things we are lugging around until we're forced to carry them. And when we find ourselves in the position of having to carry it, it may feel impossible.

What are you carrying these days that is beginning to feel like a burden? How good would it feel to relieve yourself of the things you feel enslaved to? How good would it feel to stop chasing after something for satisfaction or security that isn't working? The first question on the outline is How do you find true contentment? And that's something we'll wrestle through today.

As we finish up our study in the final chapter of 1 Timothy, we are going to see wisdom from Scripture that can help us shed some baggage and answer this in a lasting way.

In following Jesus, we are loved by the one who extends to us a most beautiful invitation to all of us feeling like we're carrying too much, saying, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Before we go any further, could I pray for us? I invite you to close your eyes and first take a deep breath or two. "God, many of us are carrying things that weigh us down, things that make us feel trapped. Jesus, would you show us today what you mean about your burden being light and help us to find true rest and contentment in you." Amen.

You can turn in your Bibles or go on your phones to 1 Timothy chapter 6, but I want to give some context as we get going. We're going to start with a couple of verses where Paul is addressing slaves in the church. Regrettably, slavery was accepted and common in the

Greco-Roman world of Paul and Timothy's day. It is estimated that at least one-third of the population in Timothy's city of Ephesus were slaves.

Now, here me say that for one person to think they can own another person is despicable in any generation, but we need to understand that slavery in Ephesus wasn't the same as slavery in our own country's ugly past, and also not the slavery that continues to happen today when someone is trafficked. In Timothy's day, slavery wasn't connected to race. Anyone could be a slave. Many people became enslaved because their debts overwhelmed them. Some even choose to become a slave to have their basic needs met for a time while they worked to get on their feet.

A slave in the Greco-Roman world was in some respects equal to his freeborn counterpart. You could be married and have children as a slave, you could receive an education and have a career as a slave. Slaves typically lived within their master's house, and so living conditions for many slaves could be better than those of poor free men who often slept in the streets of the city or lived in very cheap rooms. Slavery wasn't necessarily a life sentence. In many cases, you could earn your freedom.

But don't hear me wrong. It is still a detestable thing for anyone to think they have the right to own someone else and force them to do anything beyond their will. When we come to Bible passages addressing slaves do not take this to imply that God or any of the human writers of Scripture condoned this awful institution.

Indeed, if you remember, even in chapter 1 verse 10 of this letter, Paul puts slave traders on his list of what is ungodly and sinful, and in 1 Corinthians 7, he encourages freedom for slaves and tells people not to willingly enslave themselves to any other person.

The church was beautifully disruptive to this aspect of their culture. Paul writes in one of his other letters that in Christ, *There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus* (Gal. 3:28).

This was the beginning of the rejection of the social acceptance of slavery that had existed for thousands of years. As the gospel changed how people understood the equality of all people, society began to change. This is the transforming power of the gospel, freedom for those who feel trapped and enslaved, and it is also calls for a better way for those who have treated others unjustly.

In this new way of the early church, slaves and their masters could worship side by side. As we saw in chapter 3, in the church setting where people were elevated to leadership roles because of their character and maturity as followers of Jesus, a slave could even become an elder in the church over their master.

Can you imagine the tension in that? Try for a moment. Imagine what it would be like to be someone's slave but then become a follower of Jesus. You find a wonderful community in

your church, and you mature in your faith. Your community recognizes your honorable character as you've become more like Jesus in all you do, and they make you a leader in the church. Then your master also becomes saved and is now part of your church. What would it feel like to have him in your church? Could you be like Jesus even to him? If you could, what would that reveal about the impact of the gospel on your life? If you couldn't, what then?

This is what Paul is getting at when he says:

“All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God’s name and our teaching may not be slandered.”

It's not that slaves are being told to sweep their pain under the rug, and it's not saying that the masters have acted in respect-worthy ways. Paul is issuing a high-level challenge in how to treat others so that the fruit of the teachings of Jesus, the one who loves and treats all of us with more grace and mercy than we deserve, won't be slandered. Won't ring hollow.

He continues:

²Those who have believing masters should not show them disrespect just because they are fellow believers. Instead, they should serve them even better because their masters are dear to them as fellow believers and are devoted to the welfare of their slaves.

As the slaves were being transformed by following the way of Jesus, this verse shows that their masters were being transformed too as believers devoted to the welfare of their slaves, or at the very least, that's what Paul expects of them.

Let's be honest, though. Does this feel unfair to the slaves? It's certainly asking a lot. But think about this: would a life of hatred and contempt towards others in their church bring health to their souls, or would it continue to be a weight, a burden for them to lug around?

Do you see how what Paul is encouraging here would actually reveal something beautifully freeing in the soul of the enslaved as well as a testimony of the transforming power of the gospel to the whole community?

The genius of the gospel is that it teaches slaves how to experience contentment in a situation they cannot change, and it teaches everyone else to be discontented with slavery, leading to its eradication.

Let's continue on to the next paragraph starting with the second half of verse 2.

These are the things you are to teach and insist on. ³If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, ⁴they are conceited and understand nothing.

As we've seen throughout this whole letter, there were people in this church who were drawn to the amazing transformation power of the gospel but were not fully submitted to the way of Jesus. They were grabbing after leadership power and contaminating the church with distorted teachings.

They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions⁵ and constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

Isn't this last phrase interesting? They think that godliness is a means to financial gain? What do you think that means?

Remember that as we study the Bible, we always have to seek to understand it in its context. Do you recall what came right before this? In the prior chapter, the church was encouraged to provide double honor and financial support for ministry leaders engaged in preaching and teaching. It's not hard to imagine, then, that someone grabbing for power might want to present themselves as a godly leader and seek to be a teacher or preacher with a double win of both getting a platform for their agenda *and* get paid to do it. Let's go on.

⁶*But godliness with contentment is great gain.*

In contrast to verse 5 where corrupt leaders used an appearance of godliness to get more of what they wanted, verse 6 states that godliness with *contentment* is great gain.

What we're about to get in verses 6–10 are some pithy statements about reality. And where the beginning of the chapter addressed literal slaves, what comes next will help us see where any of us could be vulnerable to becoming enslaved to money. Let's take a closer at these statements.

What does godliness with contentment look like? Godliness means literally to be like God, to exhibit the same attributes He does to the extent that we are able. This is to be a person of love, patience, compassion, justice, mercy, kindness — basically all the good ways of being. Who doesn't want that? So that's godliness, but what about contentment?

Well, when we're chasing after nicer things or status or accomplishments, what is it that we're truly hoping to find? Isn't it contentment? We think if we just have a little more money, we'll be able to close the gap between what we have and what we think will make us happier. If we just had a little more time, we could get everything done and feel satisfied. If we just had a little more influence, we could accomplish our goals and know that we've made it.

How good would it feel to reorient our desires away from the never-ending quest for nicer things or greater status, things that only provide a temporary sense of satisfaction, and instead to become grounded as a person in the qualities that set you up to find true contentment in all circumstances?

Here's something that reveals the genius in this way of Jesus: this kind of contentment is available and possible for every one of us, regardless of our bank balance, regardless of our age or gender, regardless of whether our life situation is smooth or turbulent. There isn't anyone who can't follow Christ and discover this kind of deep contentment.

This is what Paul is getting at in his letter to the Philippians when he said he has learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. And here's the secret: I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." What that unlocks for us is this: The secret to contentment is godliness: to become like Christ through his strength.

Now, if I were you, I'd be wondering how to actually do this in a real way, not just theoretically. As we walk through the rest of this passage, I'll show you two practices that emerge from the text that can give you some practical actions.

But first, let's continue laying some foundation with the wisdom in 1 Timothy 6:
For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.

In today's language, "You can't take it with you" right? Intuitively we know that the wants we chase after in excess of our needs – our possessions, greater recognition, etc. – prove to be worthless at the end of our lives.

A dear friend of mine recently lost his father, and he told me about what it was like to walk through his dad's home and look at all the possessions and work awards he spent so much of his life acquiring, and now, following his death, they were valueless to his children. They were things to be sorted through and disposed of. Why do we let ourselves fall into this trap of thinking that we'll find satisfaction in the very things that someday our children will trash?

How much more valuable would it be at the end of our lives for our family and friends to have an abundance of stories to tell about who we were to them: a compassionate, joyful, encouraging, and gracious person rather than leaving them with the abundance of worthless things we left behind.

Our culture is constantly feeding us lies that if we just had a little more, made a little more, and experienced a little more we'd finally be satisfied. But it's a trap.

The next verse gets at that:

⁹ *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.*

It's worth noticing here that it doesn't say money is the problem – the problem is chasing after getting rich and the foolish and harmful desires that go along with that.

But, here's a sticky point: we all need money, right? We all need to pursue it to some extent just to function in society, so how do you know when you're pursuing money in a healthy and responsible way, and when you're falling into the trap that leads to destruction?

The Greek word for a *trap* here refers to the kind of wire snares the ancient world used for hunting. The kind of trap that you wouldn't realize has gotten you until you feel it closing around you.

Trying to get richer and richer is an addiction that leads us to get snared in its trap. As you make more money, you buy things and do things you couldn't do before. They're delightful. But you get used to them, and your standards and expectations increase. And as you make more and consume more, you want more. And you're trapped into feeling like you need more. Money has the power to blind you to gratitude for what you have and to keep you wanting more and like a drug addict looking for the next fix.

Soon, the emptiness of it all, or maybe the crippling weight of debt, or feeling trapped in the job you hate but pays the salary you need has enslaved you. At best, the trap of *discontentment* tightens around your neck. But it could be the trap of *selfishness* that has driven your friends away. Or the trap of *greed* that convinces you to sneak, steal, or embezzle. And you're plunged into ruin and destruction.

This is the lead-in to one of the most misquoted verses of the Bible. “Money is the root of all evil.” Is that what it says? No, look at what it really says:

¹⁰ *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.*

Money in and of itself is morally neutral. It's neither good nor bad. It's simply an arbitrary way to assign value to something. An agreed-upon way to determine how to quantify an exchange of goods or services.

It wasn't part of God's original design for humanity. Did you ever realize that? Adam and Eve had no money and they weren't afraid of being without it or even feeling like they needed it. But at some point, someone had a few more apples and animal skins than someone else and the latter person screamed, “That's not fair!” And a way to quantify how to exchange goods was established.

Now, fairness seems like a good thing, doesn't it? But what if God's goal for us isn't to think of everything in terms of fairness, but of gratitude for what we have? The problem with fairness thinking is that while it seems straightforward and balanced, it's anything but. Who gets to decide what's fair?

And when we decide that something is unfair, what we're really saying is I deserve more than I'm getting. There is something out there to have that I don't have and I should get to have it. Rather than feeding contentment, it feeds our selfishness. We begin to feel anger and resentment towards other people if our fairness meter gets triggered. Do you see how that becomes a root of evil in our soul? And as we water that root, what grows is even more jealousy, greed, and discontentment.

And that leads to the final statement of reality in this paragraph:

Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

This is why it makes sense that Paul's advice to Timothy next is:

¹¹ But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

This is great advice from Paul to Timothy, but it's also great advice for us. In light of the ways that chasing after money and the things that go with it twist our affections, how can we, too, flee from this?

Here's what I'd like you to do: consider adopting the spiritual practices of simplicity and generosity.

These are practices that can help us find, as vs. 6 said, the great gain of contentment in godliness as we use our resources in ways that elevate rather than deplete our soul. And whether we are flush with cash or cash has been all flushed out, there are ways that each of us can embrace these practices.

By simplicity, I mean living in such a way that refuses to chase after more and more and draws a line that says enough is enough. Simplicity isn't minimalism: I'm not suggesting that godly people should live in austere, empty rooms, wearing a rotation of the same black turtleneck every day. Simplicity isn't about owning less. It's about wanting less. Simplicity is a mindset of gratitude for an abundant life in Christ, and not becoming ensnared in the idea that one more purchase, streaming service subscription, or activity will finally satisfy us.

What this looks like for all of us will be unique, and it will likely vary in different chapters of our lives. But here's where to start. As you make decisions about how you will use your

resources beyond your necessities, ask yourself some reflective questions such, will this help or hinder my pursuit to become a godly person? Will this help me to pursue the life I believe God is laying out for me? Or how about: Will this recharge my soul and support the margin in my life for what is most important to me?

These kinds of questions will help to determine what to add or subtract from your life. They'll help you free yourself of heavy baggage and help you find peace and rest in the right things.

Let me ask you this, when you are in a good state of alignment with God and feeling contentment and joy in that, do you ever feel your soul get swept up in worship? Or could you imagine how that might feel? I think that's what happened to Paul in the next verses. As he was writing about the dangers of loving money more than Jesus and as he exhorted his young friend to instead pursue godliness, watch Paul get swept up:

¹³In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you ¹⁴to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.

Isn't that great? I love it. I imagine Paul's pen moving faster and faster as the words poured out of his soul. And after writing Amen, takes a few deep breaths with a contented smile on his face.

And then gets back to the topic at hand. 😊

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.

There's so much in this verse. Notice that he doesn't tell rich people that they shouldn't be rich. No, we need ambassadors for Jesus in every facet of society. Like Pastor Rick said last week, ministry costs money, and so we need people to fund ministries and ministry workers. Jesus's own ministry was funded by wealthy people, including several women listed by name.

But what Paul does say here is that those who are rich must not be arrogant or put their hope in wealth.

Do you know a wealthy person who acts like just because they have had a lot of financial success they are the expert on everything? If someone has had great success in one area, it's easy for them to overgeneralize and think they have the secret to success in all areas.

Being rich makes you vulnerable to losing humility and losing teachability. The more successful you are, the more likely you are to think you're a superior person. This verse warns us to watch out for that tendency.

It also warns us to watch out for the tendency we must find our hope and security in money. And this is where if the earlier verses gut-punched the spenders, this one is gonna get the savers. Do you feel secure in your future because of your savings? What would happen to you if that suddenly evaporated?

Can I be vulnerable with you? This is the one that gets me. I'm good with what we've talked about so far. I declutter my home for fun, and I think Steve and I could be delightfully happy in a tiny house, but the thought of losing what I've saved for my future terrifies me.

The hard truth that I'm still struggling with is that those who have more to lose tend to have an even harder time trusting God for their security than those who have less and have already discovered God's faithfulness in all situations.

It feels so much easier to have hope in wealth, even though our heads know it is uncertain. But the wisdom here reminds us that rather than the fake security of money, which loses value with inflation and stocks that become worthless in the volatility of our economic world, God, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever, will never crash. A bad economy will never diminish His resources.

But the last phrase is what really amazes me. Because there's a part of me that fears that if I hoped only in God for His provision, what He gives might be minimal and hard, but this Scripture says that God richly provides *for our enjoyment*.

This isn't painting a picture of God who supplies only the most minimal of rations like a prison warden, but of a generous Father who provides for His children in ways that bring joy and delight.

Will you be safe for me to keep being vulnerable? I know that if I believed this to the core of my soul that it would take me to a deeper level of trust in God than I already have. I want this hope to be true of me. God is working on me in this. I hope that if I ever have the opportunity to preach this passage again, I'll have a testimony of His work in my life in this, but for right now, we have a couple final verses to explore.

¹⁸ *Command them (them being the rich) to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.*

If the section above called us to the practice of simplicity, here we see the practice of generosity. If you have wealth, use it to do good. Let it fuel the impact you can have to do good deeds. Be generous and willing to share.

Why should we practice generosity? Because becoming a person of generosity is directly tied to becoming a person of love and trust in God. Becoming a person of generosity forms us as those who don't wish to hoard things for our own selfish use, but as we just saw in the character of God, wish to bless others for their own good and for their enjoyment. Becoming a person who uses what they must do good and fund good in the Kingdom of God is behind the work of every ministry changing the world for Christ.

I love this quote from writer and commentator, David Brooks:

“When people make generosity part of their daily routine, they refashion who they are... If you do a series of good deeds, the habit of other-centeredness becomes gradually engraved into your life. ...Listen, the people who radiate a permanent joy have given themselves over to lives of deep and loving contentment. Giving has become their nature and little by little they have made their souls incandescent.”

Using your resources to do good deeds, to be generous and willing to share is one of the best ways to free yourself from the trap of being enslaved to the things that you can't take with you and to find contentment and joy in a legacy that can impact generations to come.

¹⁹ 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.

And so, with that, we come to the very end of 1 Timothy. Paul finishes his letter with one final reminder saying, *“²⁰ Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, ²¹ which some have professed and in so doing have departed from the faith. Grace be with you all.”*

We have journeyed through so much with Paul and Timothy over these past 8 weeks. I challenge you sometime soon while this letter is still fresh on your mind to re-read it and write down your key takeaways. What has God brought to light for you through it? What is He wanting to work on in your soul to form you into a person who can find contentment in Him? How is He challenging you to watch both your life and your doctrine so that we can bring honor to Him in what we reproduce here for the Kingdom.

As we close out this series, let me pray for that...