

## “The Secret of Contentment” (Exodus 20:17)

We are in the series of “The Call to Undivided Intimacy,” studying the Ten Commandments. Today is the final lesson. We will study the 10th Commandment.

### Exodus 20:17

“You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

What is coveting? You see something, it's not yours, but you want it very much, you yearn for it anyway. Most of times, it involves desiring good things in a bad way.

Your friend goes on a dream vacation, but you don't. Your colleague got a latest smart watch, but you don't. Your roommate finds romance, but you don't. Your neighbor's kid entered a good school, but your kid didn't. Your neighbor's husband got a promotion, but your husband didn't. Your neighbor lost weight, but you gained. And you can't stop thinking about it and your heart demands it right now. That is coveting.

The title for today is “The Secret of Contentment.” First, we will look at the root of coveting, and find out the secret of contentment. And I'll talk about how we can have a life of contentment.

### **1. The Root of Coveting**

The root of coveting is the self-centered negative-view of God, “Can God give me what I want?” “Does God really care about what I want?”

Israel was set free from the slavery of Egypt by the mighty power of God. People of Israel walked through the sea on dry ground, and they saw that all Egyptian army was covered by water. And now they were totally free and traveling in the desert.

“The foreign rabble who were traveling with the Israelites began to crave the good things of Egypt, and the people of Israel also began to complain. “Oh, for some meat!” they exclaimed. “We remember all the fish we used to eat for free in Egypt. And we had all the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic

that we wanted. But now our appetites are gone, and day after day we have nothing to eat but this manna!" (Numbers 11:4-6)

And they had complained to God: "If only we had meat to eat! Surely we were better off in Egypt!" "Why did we ever leave Egypt?" It means that they rejected the Lord, who is there among them. (Numbers 11:18, 20)

"Coveting always entails some kind of twisted, deformed, demanding desire for what is not rightfully ours. Coveting is focusing on what you don't have instead of being grateful for what you do have. Coveting is what causes that little twinge of disappointment when someone else gets something you want."<sup>1</sup>

When God doesn't give us what we covet, we create idols and worship them, devote ourselves to them. In other words, what we covet becomes our idol.

First, we want something. "Oh, for some meat!" Then we start thinking about how much we want it. "We remember all the fish we used to eat for free in Egypt." Soon it begins to take over our thoughts, and it becomes an obsession. "If only we had meat to eat!" When we get to that point, that thing we covet has become for us a god. "Surely we were better off in Egypt! Let's go back!"

We covet success, praise, money, and pleasure. It can be anything. Anything you feel "If only I had her thick slice of apple pie, dripping with creamy chocolate source, then I would be happy, become productive and important."

## 2. A Matter of our World View

Coveting is a matter of our world view, how we see the world, life, and God.

### Psalm 73

<sup>2</sup> But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold.

<sup>3</sup> For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

<sup>4</sup> They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong.

<sup>5</sup> They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills.

<sup>12</sup> This is what the wicked are like- always carefree, they increase in wealth.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Mitchell, "Ten: How the Commandments Set Us Free," Kindle, 2016, Location 1247

<sup>17</sup> I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.

<sup>18</sup> Surely you [God] place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin.

<sup>19</sup> How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors!

<sup>25</sup> Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

<sup>26</sup> My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

The psalmist was so confused when he looked at the prosperity of the wicked in this life. Actually his heart was grieved and filled with bitterness. But he chose to be with God continuously, and moved into the deeper relationship with him. And finally he came to know their final destiny. Their rich life is just temporally, not for eternity, and their wealth cannot save them.

And he also understood that God is his portion forever. This revelation shifts his eyes from the earth to the heaven. I don't mind if they have earthly wealth, because that's only temporally things. One day, they must pay before God, who is the righteous judge. And God is my portion forever! Why should I be disturbed by the earthly things? It is so good to be with God. I set my mind on things in heaven and eternity, not on earthly things (Col 3:2).

When we rely on our earthly temporal condition, we fall into coveting. Our anchor for our life shouldn't be our own personal experiences, but the eternal promise of God.

Social media whispers that your everyday isn't good enough, that your family, your job, your talents, your friendships and your blessings are not enough. Social media whispers that you need more. Look, what they have! You need these. Not later, but now. And you nodded. In this kind of moment, you strongly believe that God, the Creator doesn't understand what you actually need. You have total confidence in that.<sup>2</sup>

Do you know what social media tries to do with you? It tries to make you spend the money you don't have, to get things you don't need, to impress people you don't know. You want to hear strangers say to you, "I like it. You are so good."

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<sup>2</sup> Christina Hergenrader, "Love Rules: A Study of the Ten Commandments," Kindle, 2016, p180

Actually this is not new. It happened at the very beginning of human history. Eve listened to the snake, the Devil, and she ate the fruit from the tree God said she shouldn't eat from.

Was that fruit Eve's? No. God said you shall not eat from it. Did she need to eat that fruit? No. She could eat from any other trees of the garden freely. Who would say "Yes! You are good! Like it!!!" when she eats that fruit? Devil! See, she took the thing she didn't own, got the thing she didn't need, and she impressed her enemy, the deceiver, the destroyer.

If only Eve could have said to the snake, "I don't need to eat that fruit. I have this whole garden from God, I have freedom to eat many different kinds of fruits God prepared for me, and I trust that's enough."

### 3. Finding Contentment in Christ

The secret of winning the battle against covetousness is finding contentment in Christ.<sup>3</sup> It is not wealth that leads us to contentment. Neither is it poverty that leads us to trust in the Lord.

The secret is Christ. He is not a dead religious man, but is risen and alive, and he is the Living God. The risen Christ works in your heart, fills you up and gives you the strength to trust Him. Circumstances, living condition, wealth, people, recognition, achievement, name, and title do not make you content, because those things are temporally. Only Jesus can give you the true contentment that liberates you from the bondage of covetousness.<sup>4</sup>

Contentment starts from within. It starts with knowing God, who loves us so much even to send His only son for us (John 3:16). It starts with trusting that He will meet all our needs as he gave us his beloved Son for us (Rom 8:32). When you know Christ, not as head knowledge, but if you open your whole self before him and let him love you, and invite His Spirit to cover you, to fill you up, He gradually begins to reorder your disordered desires.<sup>5</sup>

#### Ephesians 2:1-3

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<sup>3</sup> Mark Mitchell, 1318

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 1323

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 1314

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, <sup>2</sup> in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. <sup>3</sup> All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

This is who we used be, what we used to be deserved. But this is not the end of the story. This goes on like this:

#### Ephesians 2:4-5

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions -- it is by grace you have been saved.

God made us alive in Christ. He gave us new life, we live in Christ, with Christ, and by Christ.

#### Ephesians 2:6-7

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

God has shown us and will keep showing us the immeasurable riches of His grace. That means, each and every day of your life and my life is the arena where God shows us the immeasurable riches of His love, kindness, goodness and care. God has let us and will let us taste incomparable blessings of the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph 1:3).

Every moment of your life and my life are precious. Your minutes, hours, and days are literally gifts from God. Your everyday is important and your life is unique. There is no other day that's the same as today. There is no other life that's the same as yours.

If you're a people pleaser, you feel valuable when others like you. If you're a competitor, you feel valuable when you beat the person next to you. If you're an achiever, you feel valuable when the world sees you as doing well.

And we all know the reality that we can't feel valuable all the times, sometimes yes, but often no. Then, you look at what others have, and feel "I need that too." You start coveting.

The truth is this. The grace of God, forgiveness of God makes you valuable.

The grace of God is the great equalizer. Because of God's love, each of us is equally valuable and equally loved.<sup>6</sup> There is no room for coveting in the kingdom of God.

By grace of God, through your faith in Christ, you were made a child of God, you were welcomed into God's family, you became heir to the kingdom (Eph 1:11), and you are seated with Him in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6). You constantly hear God says "You are precious in my eyes. I love you." "You are my beloved child. I'm pleased with you."

Application no. 1. Listen to God. We need to hear from God. We need to spend time with Jesus alone. This is not optional, but is essential for all of us.

Whose words are we listening to most of times? Internet, social media, movies, songs, advertisements, people, or Jesus? We must intentionally separate us from these noise, and deliberately come to him, and just be with him.

#### **4. Recognize God's gifts and enjoy them**

Application no. 2. Recognize God's gifts and enjoy them.

"You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor." Where does this commandment lead us to? It brings us to trusting God. He created you unique, gave you unique gifts and talents, gave you a unique life with unique goals which look very different from anyone else's. And all of us, each one of us has the same ultimate purpose, that is to glorify God.

"He might not take you on the path of glory but on the path of service. He may not lead you down the path of wealth but on the path of humbleness. He may not take you on the path of power but along the path of an encourager."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Christina Hergenrader, 211

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 190

Through you, God will be glorified in very unique ways. Through you, someone will encounter Jesus. Someone will find love and truth. Someone will recover their dignity. Experiencing the Life, Changing Lives!

But when we covet, do you know what is happening? You proclaim to your neighbor, "My God is not worthy to be trusted. He is not enough." That's the message we demonstrate when we covet. But God says "No, no, no. Don't do that. Remember who I am, and remember who you are."

Everybody on this earth wants to have a life of contentment. That's why people covet. As we just studied, the secret of contentment is Christ. When we recognize God's gifts and enjoy them, people will see our God is great, He is enough. Each one of us is sent to the world to show Christ is enough. Every one of us is God's message to testify Christ is enough, to this broken society (2 Cor 3:3). Experiencing the Life, Changing Lives! That's who we are. That's why Christ died for us.

What gifts does God give us? First, you may think about Spiritual gifts. And faith is a gift actually.

God also gave us different kinds of gifts. Your personality. Your character. Your skills. Knowledge. Training. Your job. Position. And health of course. And your gender can be a gift from God as he created you so.

And do you know your family is a gift? Psalm 127:3 (NASB) says "Behold, children are a gift of the LORD." And singleness also can be a gift from God (cf. 1 Cor 7:7, 32, 34).

So, basically who you are is a gift. Your whole self is a gift. Don't neglect who you are. Don't take it for granted who you are. It's just wasting your gifts and time if you are wishing and wanting the things your neighbor has, because it can change nothing.

Instead of coveting, ask God: how God has gifted you with specific gifts to serve others. And practice them. Enjoy them. Bless others with your gifts.

This is interesting. "Walking around and offering kindness to others in the world reduces anxiety and increases happiness and feelings of social connection," said psychologist Douglas Gentile of Iowa State University. This is not a theory on a table, but a conclusion of scientific research.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> [https://www.sciencealert.com/want-to-improve-your-mood-the-way-is-easy-and-it-only-takes-12-minutes?fbclid=IwAR2\\_peMAhmDPOoOG7kVmaGhQwFdOCq3K3nhbogH92lv1dut-XCpLNZPKX6c](https://www.sciencealert.com/want-to-improve-your-mood-the-way-is-easy-and-it-only-takes-12-minutes?fbclid=IwAR2_peMAhmDPOoOG7kVmaGhQwFdOCq3K3nhbogH92lv1dut-XCpLNZPKX6c)

It's not just in a church meeting. Your office, your school, your neighborhood is your arena to practice them. You may have more opportunity to practice your gifts with your colleagues, customers, friends, students and neighbor.

## 5. The Call to Undivided Intimacy

It's a lifelong lesson to love God and each other, and it's impossible to be perfect.<sup>9</sup>

And that brings us back to Christ always. Our life is not about you, nor about me, but our life is about Christ. Paul said, "To live is Christ" (Phi 1:21). And he is the most precious and important gift for us.

### Philippians 4:11-13

I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

### Colossians 2:10

You have been given fullness in Christ

When we covet, we're saying "God, you are not enough. I can't trust you. I want to be like them."

Through the Ten Commandments, God is saying that I'm the God who created heaven and earth. I'm in control of them. I saved you from the yoke of slavery, set you free from the evil power. I opened the way in the middle of the Red Sea, and let you cross it. I know all you need. I've been giving you water, food, in the wilderness. I've been protecting you and taking you to the promise land.

Am I not enough for you? Come to me, taste me. You'll know nothing can make you content, but me. Don't covet. Stay with me, remain in my love and justice. I'll make you blessing, and all people will be blessed through you.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 213



He is calling us to Undivided Intimacy.

Our life is a gift. We have only one life to live. And it has limit on this earth. Every second, our end is coming nearer. You can't go back. Coveting kills our precious time.

“The only way to live — in the first century or the twenty-first — is to trust that every moment of your life is an exciting adventure and a gift from your heavenly Father. Celebrate this life, celebrate your status as His redeemed child, and celebrate these exact blessings He's given you.”<sup>10</sup>

Trust God. Listen to him and follow him, believing that He will shine enough light for your next step. He knows what you need, what is the best for you. Submit yourself to him wholeheartedly, because Christ is the secret of contentment. Only then, you will experience that he is enough for you. And your life, my life declares His glory, praising “My God is great. Nothing can be compared to him.”

It is the call to undivided intimacy.

### **For LifeNet groups and personal reflection**

1. Tell your story of coveting. How did it start and grow? At the end what did you do, and how did you feel about it? And receiving help from the Spirit, think about its root, what you actually sought for.
2. Tell a story about your experience in which you felt Jesus was enough. How are you spending time with Jesus daily? What gets in the way? How will you make fellowship with Jesus deeper?
3. Make a list of what you're thankful for. How can you use these blessings to bless God and others?
4. Make a list of how God has shaped you with specific gifts. How do you use these gifts from God for Him, and for others?

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 171

