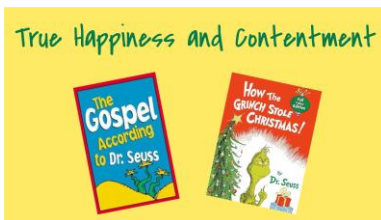


True Happiness and Contentment

August 31, 2025

Matthew 6:9-11

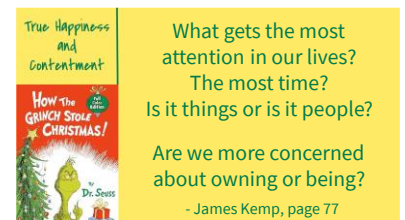
⁹Pray like this: Our Father who is in heaven, uphold the holiness of your name. ¹⁰Bring in your kingdom so that your will is done on earth as it's done in heaven. ¹¹Give us the bread we need for today.



As we close out our Dr. Seuss series, we return to the classic, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. We first touched on this book in week six, back on July 13th. On that Sunday we talked about the fact that

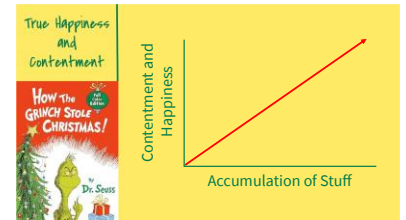
those who are the hardest to love are often the ones who need it most, along with a heaping helping of grace. We spoke of how love and grace are a mighty powerful combo. This Sunday, as we return to *The Grinch*, we focus on the most obvious and basic lesson, the issue of the priorities in our lives. As we prepare for this time together, to frame the conversation, I ask these questions posed by Thomas Kemp on page 77 of *The Gospel According to Dr. Seuss*:

What gets the most attention? The most time? Is it things or is it people?... And: Are we more concerned about owning or being? These are challenging questions. During the passing of the peace, we began down this road. As we prepare to continue, let us pray...



You can turn on or go to almost any news program, any self-help channel, any podcast, any social media feed, any coffee gathering at the local spot and you will hear all about what has gone wrong with our world. The places of blame may vary slightly. You might hear about the decline of the family, about the entertainment industry, about social media, about the government, even about banning prayer from our schools. The list goes on and on.

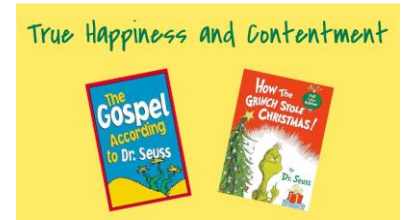
But one thing – unless you’re tuning into some religious station or podcast or whatever – one thing we do not hear often are the negative influences of materialism. Did you ever notice this or pause to wonder why? I think we avoid blaming materialism because it is so deeply embedded in our culture and in our lives. We live in a materialistic society. We live in a culture that is much more interested in material things than in spiritual things. As a society we have an almost unquenchable thirst for more. Our culture tells us that we are not really living if we don’t drive certain kinds of cars or own a certain brand of cell phone or wear a particular brand or style of clothing. We have mistakenly equated the accumulation of stuff with happiness and contentment. This is simply not true.



People who want to defend a materialistic lifestyle will be quick to point out that it is not money that lies at the root of all evil, but it is the love of money that is the root of all evil. If Jesus were to hear that, in his fashion, I think Jesus would say, “But I say to you, saying this is simply a way of avoiding the issue of materialism.” After all, we live in a culture that loves money and the things that it can buy. Going back to our framing questions, love is defined by where we spend our time, our focus, our energy. From this perspective, we live in a culture that loves our things and, therefore, loves our money.

The reality, though, is that money and material things cannot produce happiness. Many lottery winners will tell you that their big payout did not improve the quality of their lives. Some will say it made their lives worse. The process of determining who your true friends and real family are can really be quite painful. Many a couple has started life earning \$25,000 a year. Soon they dream of making \$40,000, thinking life will be so much better. Soon enough they have eclipsed \$70,000 or more but still have lots of unpaid bills.

The desire for things that they cannot afford continues to drive their lives and true happiness and contentment continue to elude them. No matter what we have, whether a little or a lot, one truth generally remains: we want more. If we were satisfied with that salary level or that new home or car or phone or... then we would not have the problem with materialism that we have today.

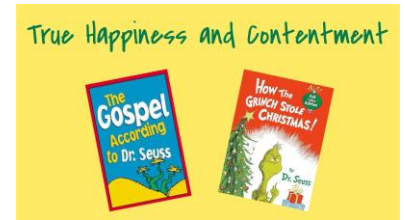


Our cultural fascination with money and material things has led to some problems. More than ever, there is a growing division between rich and poor. Our culture no longer feels like one where all people are welcome and where all people feel equally treated. The divide between the haves and the have-nots is evident in many areas. Equitable access to education, health care, legal services, and affordable housing are just a few of the areas where we see this division.

As we have become a culture who accumulates more and more money and things, we have become more and more independent, more and more self-sufficient, and more and more isolated. Do you know what the one device is that changed it all? And guesses? Yes, the garage door remote control. With this handy little device, we abandoned our front yards and front porches – the places that we used to gather to check in with our neighbors. Remote in hand, we just zip into our homes or condos without having to speak to or interact with anyone. Safely inside we can turn on our big screen TVs and eat our drive-through dinner on our comfortable leather sofas. Insulated and isolated, we can tell ourselves that we are happy, that life is good. But this temporary joy is much like that ball of newspaper that you toss on the campfire – a quick burst of flame but no lasting fire.

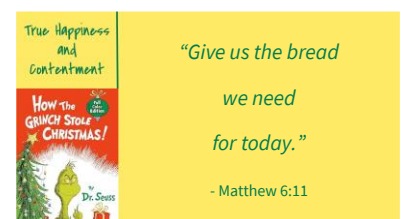


Yet oh how we love the bright and flashy and new. These things provide the illusion of happiness and contentment. And the pursuit of said things can distract us or even prevent us from exploring the relationships and connections that actually bring us true happiness and contentment. Yes, things produce the expectation of happiness and contentment, but ultimately only let us down or leave us feeling less than.



In recognition of this reality, when Jesus modeled prayer for the disciples, he first focused on the proper place of God in our lives and within our priorities. He began, *“Our Father who is in heaven, uphold the holiness of your name.”* Jesus knew the importance of recognizing the holiness and otherness of God. Recognizing these things is an act of humility. Humility is a natural deterrent to the materialism that plagues our world. Next, Jesus taught the disciples to pray, *“Bring in your kingdom so that your will is done on earth as it’s done in heaven.”* God’s kingdom is one where the hungry are fed, where the naked are clothed, where the sick are cared for, where the lonely are visited. Today, God’s kingdom would be one where all people have equal access to education, health care, legal services, and affordable housing. This is the kingdom that we are to pray for. This is the kind of kingdom that we are to bend our will towards. This is the kingdom that we are to work towards building, making it a reality. Talk about a deterrent to materialism.

Then, in verse 11, Jesus offered perhaps the best defense against materialism. In verse 11 Jesus prayed, *“Give us the bread we need for today.”* He did not pray for a five-course gourmet meal. In this same spirit, we should not pray for a new car or cell phone.



We should not pray for that pay raise or that promotion. Jesus is praying as we should pray – for the basic necessities for another day so that we can focus on the truly important things.

The idea of daily bread connects back to the story of manna in the wilderness. In Hebrew, the word for “manna” sounds like “Whosit?” It was a mystery. Yet the manna sustained the people throughout their entire 40 years in the wilderness. For the Israelites and for us as we pray this petition, the daily bread is one of physical sustenance given by God. And in a similar way, our lives are sustained by the divine. Without the purpose of God, we would not draw another breath. There is also an eternal side to the spiritual sustenance that we receive from God.

Jesus speaks of this in John 6:51, where he says, *“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever.”* In these words, we gain a spiritual understanding of the daily bread that transcends our physical existence. We believe that Christ, the divine bread, is sustenance for an exodus from sin's captivity in this world. God gives us nourishment, both of body and soul, to journey on as we walk in faith each day, trusting in God's presence and provision.

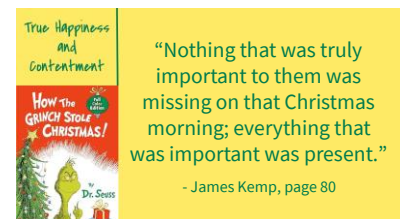
In reality, everything is a gift from God. For us today, the daily bread that God provides sustains us in ways beyond our comprehension, not to mention beyond our control. So for us, as it was with the Israelites and the manna, trusting in God must be a daily practice. In the wilderness, everybody got a day's worth of bread, not a weeks' worth, except on the eve of the Sabbath, when they got two days' worth. They gathered their daily bread each day. Likewise, we do not pray for a lifetime supply of bread, but for our daily bread, bread for this day, for one day at a time.

In this way, our daily bread is like our breathing: each breath — this breath — is a gift from God. In a similar way, grace comes to us one breath at a time, as a gift that is given. We must learn to trust in God's grace too. Understanding God's provision and grace as gifts, we begin to feel gratitude. That leads to true happiness and contentment.

This is something that the Grinch did not understand. Well, not at first anyway. The Grinch tried to practice what one might call “reverse materialism.” He thought that if he could just take away all of the Who's stuff, all of their things, all of their Christmas, then he could take away their happiness, dragging them down to his level of misery and anger.

When the Who's woke up for Christmas morning, they did not even have their “daily bread.” The Grinch had stolen every last piece of food from Whoville. While the Grinch thought that it was the Who's that were in for a big surprise that morning, it was really the Grinch who was in for a surprise. There was no misery or anger in Whoville. There was no crying or boo-hooing. Those Who's – they never missed a beat. Even though their presents and their trees and their trimmings and their food were gone, they still had Christmas. The presents and trees and whatnot, they were just symbols of something much more important and lasting. Those “things” were not the priority at Christmas. They did not hold their things too dear.

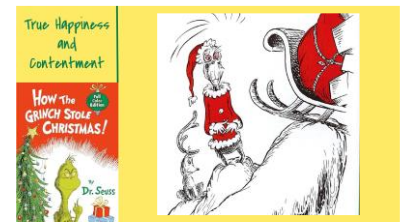
On page 80 Thomas Kemp writes this: “Nothing that was truly important to them was missing on that Christmas morning; everything that was important was present.” So, the Who's stood in a big circle, hand in hand. The young and the old, the rich and the poor, the men and women and children joined together in song, celebrating life and love, family and friends. Their relationships, the personal connections, that was the priority in Whoville.



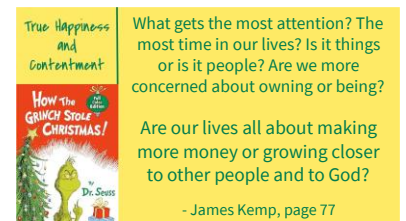
I can't help but wonder: if my family, if your family, woke up on some Christmas morning and all that we had was each other, would we join hands and celebrate life and love, family and friends?

In *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas*, as he stood atop his mountain, he heard those songs of joy and celebration being lifted. The “things” that he stole – all of them – did not matter one bit to the Who's. Christmas came without ribbons or tags or packages, boxes, or bags.

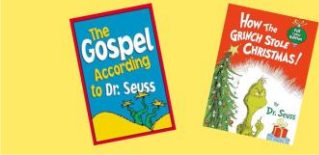
With feet freezing in the snow, we recall, the Grinch thought, “Maybe Christmas *doesn't* come from the store. Maybe Christmas... perhaps... means a little bit more.” We also recall it was this understanding that caused the Grinch's undersized heart to grow three sizes that day. Yes, Christmas did mean a little bit more. In fact, it means a whole lot more.



As we come to a close, let us return to the questions that we started with: What gets the most attention in our lives? The most time? Is it things or is it people? Are we more concerned about owning or being? Over the course of this time together, have your answers changed? To these hard questions about our priorities in life, Kemp adds this question: About making more money or growing closer to other people and to God? O Lord, “*Give us the bread we need for today.*” And fill our lives and our hearts with the joy of relationship and connection – with you and with one another.



True Happiness and Contentment



Almost two thousand years ago the Savior of the world was born of a humble virgin who came riding on a donkey. He spent his first night in the barn amongst the animals. Mary and Joseph were grateful for the place that God had provided. In such a humble place, not surrounded by the things of this world, the secret of true and lasting joy can be found. With humility and gratitude in our hearts and in our lives, we can find the path to true happiness and contentment in this life. May it be so for you and for me. Alleluia and amen.

GPS - Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. When has lessening your grip on your stuff (possessions, time, gifts...) led to a growth in your relationship with Christ? How can you repeat this process this week?
- 2) *Pray*. Where do you struggle most with materialism? Spend some time in the Bible and in prayer seeking guidance from the Lord.
- 3) *Study*. Read Matthew 6:12-13. How do these verses align with and deepen your understanding of finding true happiness and contentment in this life?