Hebrews 13:5-6
“Simplicity”

I’m gonna tell y’all this story. When I was either a senior in high school or a freshman in college I did something my Dad thought was strange. (**pause**) Dad simply could not understand why I was doing it. When I was about 18 years old I bought my first sports coat. I bought this sports coat. I have had this sports coat for 22 years . In all of that time I have moved a lot. I have cleaned out my closet a bunch of times and given stuff to Goodwill. I got married. I got married to a good woman who hates clutter so one of the first things she did was to overhaul my closet. (**pause**) And yet this sport coat has been around the whole time. I have worn it to weddings, and job interviews and before I had robes I even preached in this jacket. I have a lot of memories in this jacket. Sadly, it has now become a little snug across the shoulders, but I love this jacket. This jacket is teaching me a powerful lesson about life. There is a something to be said about being content with what we have.

Sisters and brothers let me ask you something. How many of y’all stress out about bills? How many of y’all stay up at night wondering how am I gonna pay the mortgage, or the car payment, or the cell phone bill? How many of y’all look at things around your house and think, “Why did I buy that?” “Why did I spend money on that?” “I wish I could have that money back, right now.”

On the flip side, how many of us have bought a new computer, or a new car, or a new home and a week or so later started thinking or evening planning what you are going to get next. Maybe the computer isn’t fast enough, or it doesn’t have a powerful video card; or the car doesn’t have that back up camera or blind spot warning system. Maybe the dream house you just bought needs new appliances, or the carpet is just builder’s grade, and it’s too rough on your kids’ knees when they play. Maybe the yard needs a fence, or you would like a pool in the back yard.

Did you know there is a name for this discontent? It is called Restless Heart Syndrome. Brothers and sisters why is it we have restless heart syndrome? Why are we not content with what we have? (**pause**) On that back panel of your bulletin I would like you to take a moment to answer this question. On a scale from 1-10 with ten being completely satisfied, how happy are you with you? How happy are you with you? Is there anything you need to work on with you? And if so, what? (**pause**) I wonder. I wonder if maybe, just maybe we are not content because we have things out of order. There was a great Scottish philosopher and politician of the late eighteenth and earth nineteenth centuries named James Mackintosh who wrote these words. “It is right to be contented with what we have, but never with what we are.” (**repeat x2**)

Most of us are pretty content with how much time we spend in worship. Although, as I say that it occurs to me I have never heard someone complain about a sermon being too short. We are mostly content with how much we pray. We are content with how often we read our Bible. We are content with how often we stand up for others, or how compassionate we are. We think this makes us righteous, and sometimes we are self-righteous. But according to Mr. Mackintosh we’ve missed the point. We are not meant to be content with ourselves. We are meant to be content with what we have. Hebrews 13:5-6 says:

“Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, ‘I will never fail you nor forsake you.’ Hence we can confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid; what can man do to me?’”

It would appear from this Scripture in Hebrews we are to question in ourselves whether we are actually doing all we can to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind and all our strength. Are really loving our neighbor as ourselves? We are to be discontent in these things because these are areas where we need to grow closer to God the most. However, our culture continually tells us we need to be discontent in our possessions. Another passage of Scripture; this one from Luke says, “Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions” (Luke 12:15). So how do we become content and how does being content help to make life more abundant?

Here are four tricks for becoming more content. John Ortberg the pastor of Menlo Presbyterian Church in California says we should memorize these four words; “**It could be worse**.” (**repeat 2x**) When you leave today and you look over at someone else’s car that’s newer than yours and you get into your car with 80 -100K miles on it I want you to say these words, “It could be worse.” When you go to work, before you open the doors take a deep breath and say, “It could be worse.” Then you go home to your home and start thinking about how some people have a better home than you do, please say to yourselves, “It could be worse.” Tonight you sit down to supper across from your spouse and you say,… okay. Maybe you don’t say it then. (**pause**) Maybe you just think it. Monty Python in the movie, “The Life of Bryan,” put it this way. “Always look on the bright side of your life.” It means finding the silver lining in the things you have.

The second trick to contentment is to ask this question. “**For How Long Will This Make Me Happy?**” As I was reading Adam Hamilton’s book, “Enough: Discovering Joy Through Simplicity and Generosity,” this question really hit me. By a show of hands how many of us have become fixated on something we’ve just gotta have? Cookie season is coming up so maybe some of us are fixated on a new Kitchen Aid mixer. Some of our kids are just dying for a new video game system. Christmas is right around the corner. How many of us have found ourselves secretly longing for a new cell phone, or new golf clubs, or some other new toy? But we all know what’s going to happen. We will barely get the thing open and start looking for the next thing to long for and lust after. What if we asked the question, “How long will this make me happy?” What if I could try it before I bought it? What if I rented a Nintendo Switch and then decided if it was worth it? What if I tried someone else’s mixer to make cookies one day? What if we rented a house on the lake before we bought one? How many of those things might we decide we only want to borrow from time to time? How many of those things might we decide really aren’t that great for us?

The third key to contentment is **developing a grateful heart**. Adam Hamilton tells a story about a guy who had a terrible fight with his wife. He got so mad he left the house at nine o’clock one night to take a walk. He was frustrated and complained to God by asking, “God why did you give me such a stubborn woman?” After he had vented all of that stuff he remembered, “But you did give her to me God.” Then he started to reflect on all of the things about his wife he truly loves, and by the time he returned home he was grateful for his wife. Gratitude is central to becoming content. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, “Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” If we want to live abundant lives free of the stress of debt we need to start by learning to be grateful for what we have.

The fourth point is to ask ourselves, “**Where does my soul find true satisfaction?**” This is actually a part of my call story. I had the good job straight out of college. The pay wasn’t great, but it had the full benefits package and the two weeks’ vacation, and was good. But I was miserable. This job was paying the bills, but it wasn’t bringing me any satisfaction, and I was miserable. So one day I asked when was I truly happy? In what did I find satisfaction? For me that was in teaching and leading, and setting an example for others, and working hard, and seeing the good things that come from doing those things well. From that simple question, “From where does my satisfaction come?” my life began to change. I started growing closer to God in ways that were a lot less about lip service, and going through the motions, and a lot more about finding satisfaction in what God has given me.

So, living simply can help us to be someone who chooses to live in one of two tents. We can be content or discontent. If we are going to be content then it might just be time to look at the possession which are keeping us up at night. If we can be content in a smaller house then why are we in hock for a mortgage we cannot afford? If we can be content with an older car, or a car with fewer features then perhaps it’s time to sell that car and buy a car we can pay off quickly so the bill is not keeping us up at night. Maybe we don’t need cable. Maybe we can pay less for a streaming service on line. These are some starting points to get us thinking. This much is for certain in whatever decisions we make. Living outside of our means with the worry of debt over our heads stinks. There is nothing abundant about it. However, if we choose to live our lives more simply we can be free of the stress that comes with debt, and be free to serve God joyfully.

That is what it means to live a good and abundant life.

In the name of Jesus Christ,
 Amen