

Consumed Week Two:  
Contentment  
Jeff Jones, Senior Pastor  
1 Timothy 6:6-11; 17-19

The Jerk: All I Need Scene

{come out with robe, pants?} I don't need anything. Except this. And maybe this. I got my laptop and golf club and cell phone. That's all I need. Oh and this. My \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_. That's it. That's all I need.

Can you relate? Today in our *Consumed* series we are going to hear something that just sounds crazy in a consumed culture, a culture driven by consumerism. What God is going to say sounds like a foreign language, because to a culture driven by more, consumed with what we don't yet have, He is going to say, "Be content with what you already have; the constant desire for more is just a trap." In a culture like this, that seems nuts.

The average American 5 year old has 250 toys. They've only been alive about 250 weeks, which means that the average 5 year old has grown up getting one new toy a week for his or her whole life. And that's average! In our community, is that 500 toys? 1000? Two or three new toys every week? And we wonder why as they get older they never seem to appreciate what they have but always want more? We've trained them well!

We are a culture consumed with more. Every week we are all exposed to thousands of commercials, bombarded with images and statements about all these things we do not yet have that we really do need. In Bible times, they didn't have that challenge, but we do. Every time I read a golf or sailing magazine it wakes up this consumer appetite. Ooh, I need one of those!

And then our friends get something new, something that we don't have or theirs is new and ours is old, and all of us a sudden we aren't so content any more with what we have. They get a new car, a new kitchen, a new computer, a new purse, a new plasma TV, and we feel this deficit, this lack, this injustice. If they can afford it, surely I can afford it. We ride in their new car, then get back in our's and our car smells like old French fries and kid's feet...and the appetite grows. We watch a game at their house, with their new 60" plasma, and we come back to our little 42 inch, and it is just so tiny. How can you really be a true Cowboy fan and think you can fully experience a game on a 42" screen? Un-American!

We go in stores, and there is all this stuff we don't have—everywhere. Ever go into Costco or Home Depot to buy one thing? Have you ever actually just bought one thing? It's hard, because you see all these things and you realize that you need them, you really need them. You didn't know you needed it when you got there, but now that you see it, you have to have one of those. Your hose just sits on the ground, but this thing holds it up in the air and you NEED it.

Today in 1 Timothy 6 God is going to shout into our culture: Beware! Consumption is an appetite that will eat way everything good in your life! Beware of the consumption trap. If you and I don't intervene in our own lives, our constant desire for more in a world that makes it relatively easy to get will lead us down a path that only leads to trouble, regret, and insignificance. Let's hear what he has to say in

Slide: \_\_\_\_\_) 1 Timothy 6:6-10

*But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*

Not money itself, but the love of money and all it can buy, the consumption appetite unchecked is a trap. Like a crab going into the cage to go after the fish, we just consume our way to trouble. Consumption, the desire for more, is an appetite that we all have and that can never be satisfied. You never get to a place where you've had enough. The more you get the more you want.

It's like these M&Ms. These are my favorite, the almond ones. Wow. But once you start, hard to stop! One just wakes up the appetite. Sex works the same way. For those of you who are young singles, or in high school or college, don't be stupid this way. I've heard people say, "I just want to have sex one time, because then I'll be okay. Then I'll know what it is about, and I won't want to do it any more. That desire will be out of the way until I'm married." Doesn't work that way! All you will do is wake up this appetite that only wants more. The more you have, the more you want.

Money and things are that way. The more you have the more you want, the more you think about things. Consumption easily consumes you, takes over your whole thought life. Until you get that next new thing, you find yourself daydreaming about it, that new car, that new purse, those new shoes, that new TV, those new golf irons. Once you get that next thing, you'll be fine...won't need anything else. But it doesn't work that way, and you go down the trail to your own ruin. The consuming appetite takes over, and you start making really stupid decisions. What Paul is saying is that once this appetite is alive and well in your life, you make decisions that end up with distraction from really important things at best and destruction and ruin at the worst.

At best, we just end up with an insignificant life, consumed with things that don't matter. It's like taking your kids to ChuckE Cheese. Our kids were really into the games where you got the little tickets, and you collect these tickets and then get to go to the little store and buy some treasure, something really valuable. You spend 30 dollars playing these games to get 150 tickets. How cool is that, you can't even hardly hold them all. You are rich! And you take those tickets to the store, and you see what you can buy. A \_\_\_\_\_! Exciting for about twenty minutes. As parents we look at our kids and think, "Kids are

pretty stupid. So excited about things that are so worthless!” And we don’t realize that God is looking at us in this great big ChuckE Cheese world with all that we buy and get so temporarily excited about, and he is saying, “My children are often so stupid! So excited about things that are so worthless!”

At worst, though, we can actually lose what is most valuable by being consumed with consumption. He says some have wandered from the faith, many others have plunged themselves into ruin, others have caused huge grief in their lives, all because of this consumption appetite. We so want more money, more raises, more stuff, that we set the pursuit for more one of our highest priorities, so much so that we are willing to sacrifice everything for it—our marriages, time with our kids, our integrity, our reputation, our opportunity to serve God by serving others. We risk what is most important for this amazing appetite.

Clearly not a smart way to live life, but it is so American, so us, we have to ask what the alternative is? And Paul is going to tell us the alternative way to live than a consumption consumed life. He simply says,

Slide: \_\_\_\_\_) 1 Timothy 6:6-8

*“Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.”* As long as we have the basics, what we truly only need, then be content. Be content with what you already have if you want to escape the consumption trap, the constant appetite for more.

Sounds easy, doesn’t it. Just be content with what you already have. So, right now, let’s all snap our fingers and be content. Wish it was that easy! My question is, how? How do we shut this appetite down? Can we? Is that even the answer? Do we just act like we don’t want new things?

Paul is going to give us the answer, and it is not acting like you don’t have the appetite. Life is not a diet where you are really hungry but somehow pretend you are not. It’s not about denying your appetite. What it is though is redirecting that appetite, that desire for more, that discontent with the present to something else, to something more significant, away from junk food toward something much better. The answer is rechannel that energy, that discontent with the present that is alive in all of us, toward things that really do matter. Look at the next verse,

Slide: \_\_\_\_\_) 1 Tim 6:11

*But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith...”* Paul tells Timothy, as well as you and me, to channel our natural desires for more towards things that matter, towards a more Christ-like character and more ministry effectiveness as we fight the good fight of faith, allow God to use us in this battle for people’s souls that we are in.

How does this relate to our money? That's what Paul is going to talk about in the rest of the chapter. Someone who is consumed by Christ and his purposes, as we talked about last week, will be driven very differently than someone consumed by consumption. We take those desires for more, that discontent with the present that we all have, and with our money make very different choices with very different results. Let's read what he says in verse 17:

Slide: \_\_\_\_\_) 1 Timothy 6:17

*Command those who are rich in this present world... Let me stop there. He's talking about you. You are the rich. Half the people on this planet, about 3 billion people, live on less than 2 dollars a day. I've got two dollars right here, and I can throw them away right now and nobody would get too upset. And no one on the front rows are diving for it. Some are eyeing it, thinking about it. But nobody here gets too excited about 2 bucks, because we are wealthy. If you live on more than that, you are in the upper half of the world's wealthy. If your household income is 37K or more, you are in the top 4% of the world's wealthy. If it is 45K or more, you are in the top 1%. He's talking about you and me here:*

Slide: \_\_\_\_\_) 1 Timothy 6: 17-19

*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. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. 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.*

He commands us how to live a new way of living with our money...something not to do and something to do. The not to do is to not put our hope in wealth, not to become arrogant and think that we are somehow bulletproof because of all the wealth we have built up. The reason is that wealth is fleeting, and we certainly can relate to that right now, can't we?

Slide: \_\_\_\_\_) Proverbs 23:5

says, "*Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle.*"

The something to do is to be rich in good works, to be generous, and willing to share—that is the new pursuit. Again, the answer to the consumption trap is not to deny our appetite for more, but redirect to a whole new passion, a new pursuit...that pursuit is the purposes of God and therefore with our money choosing generosity over greed, giving over spending...to be rich in good deeds, generous, and ready to share. We will all be

consumed by something, and he is telling us to be consumed with doing good, a much different way to live with much different results.

He tells us the results, both in the future (eternity) and in our lives now. He says that in the future, in eternity, that by using our money for doing good, giving to the poor and funding God's work in this world, those who do so will

Slide: \_\_\_\_\_) 1 Timothy 6:19b

*“lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age...”* As we talked about last week, the Bible teaches that we are rewarded in eternity for whatever we give to the poor and give to ministry here on this planet, that we have a bank account in heaven that can only be filled down here. Last week we talked about choosing to either live for the dot, this little blip of time in this life, or for the line, eternity. Those who are consumed with doing good, with God's kingdom and therefore choose generosity over consumerism, build treasure in heaven.

And at present, they also gain for themselves the ultimate gift in this life. He says that through a life of radical generosity,

Slide: \_\_\_\_\_) 1 Timothy 6:19c

*“they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”* Notice what he says, that it is only through generosity that we can buy life that is “truly life,” as opposed to plastic life, not real life, some cheap imitation of a great life. The temptation is to settle for the imitation of life, and be left with the emptiness and insignificance of that. God points us to real life, and the only way to gain it is by giving our life away, giving what we have away, a radically generous life.

Generosity is the only way to break the back of consumerism in our lives. We take our desire for more and channel it to more good not more stuff. We channel it to God's kingdom, to things that matter, not to fluff. At the beginning of this series on money and things we said that it is not about getting something from you but giving something to you, and that something is the promise of life that is truly life.

What I have found is this, that there really is no other way to live, and that once someone gets on a track of generous living, where they practice planned, priority, percentage giving, there is no going back. That's why going on mission trips is such an important thing to do, because you really do realize what is most important. I have never heard a person who has come back from a trip where have been serving the poor and helping people come to know Christ say, “Oh, I've got to get a new car, new purse, new TV!” There is this sickness about our lives where we realize we are just eating junk food, we are missing real life.

Here's my observation as a pastor: Hands down, the happiest people in our church are not the most consumptive but the most generous. I've been so privileged to get to know a

number of really generous people in this church and connected to this place. A couple of months ago I spent some time with a man who owns a very successful company and yet is consumed with generosity. He makes enough money to give away 90% of his income. He is a reverse tither. He could certainly choose to live a much more lavish lifestyle. He could afford to buy his own planes and houses around the world. But he doesn't. He gets the biggest kick out of doing incredible good all around the world. He's like a little kid he is so excited. I've met various people in this church who are incredibly generous, and you see what real life is all about.

I remember one couple in the Imagine Campaign, where we raised money for this building. I knew that they were very generous people and would want to consider making a considerable gift, so I set up a meeting at their house to talk with them about it. When I got there, they met me at the door and said, "Jeff, we are so glad you are here, but please go home and be with your family. We know how busy you are and you are having all these meetings with groups of people to help raise money for the building, and we don't want to eat up your evening. The truth is, there is nothing you are going to say that is going to cause us to sacrifice any less. We are going to give sacrificially not just generously and you aren't going to be able to talk us out of that. So, please go home." I was kind of stunned. We did talk for a while, but a whole different attitude in life that most people have, but these are extremely happy people. I could keep talking about people in this church who have learned the reality of 1 Timothy 6, and the cool thing is that God keeps blessing them financially—which only makes sense that God would do what he says he will do, be generous with those who are generous. These people just keep giving it away, consumed with doing good, which also helps them enjoy the things they do have all the more, no guilt, no regret.

The older lady who disciplined me early on in life, Miss Helen, was maybe the most generous and joyful person I have ever been around. I'll share more about that in the last week, but she grew up that way. She grew up in a strong Christ-follower home, where her dad was generous and faithful and gave in a priority, planned, percentage way. Her dad then invented a way of smelting steel that revolutionized the industry and generated many millions of dollars for himself. Before the windfall of money started coming in, they prayed as a family and decided to limit their income to a comfortable way of life and give away the rest, rather than just letting their lifestyle of consumption grow with their income. They assumed God was giving it to them so that they could give it away to others in need and to fund kingdom ministry. They capped their lifestyle so that they could give more. Over the next couple of decades, as she was growing up as a little girl, they gave away a fortune and did incredible good. They often prayed and made decisions as a family what they would give to, and she learned that there is just no better way to live than generosity. She learned early on about how to gain life that is truly life.

I really think most of us know this cognitively, but it is hard to live a radically generous life in a culture that makes out-of-control consumption so easy and look so good. In a culture where all this junk food is in front of us, we take our appetite for more and get consumed with consumption rather than doing good, rather than generosity. Paul tells us to run away from that temptation, flee it, and instead pursue life that is really life.

And the great news is that it seems quite clear that God is giving our culture and even more specifically Christians in our culture a major wake-up call about what is really important. With this financial turmoil, let me give some perspective by sharing a story.

A number of years ago I had these meetings in Germany that were held in different parts of the country, which meant that I would spend a couple of weeks driving all over Germany, which means I'd be driving on the autobahn a lot. See where I'm going? I was excited about the meetings, but the autobahn thing really got me going. I fly there and then go the Avis rental car counter to pick up my car, my autobahn mobile, and they had this sign out that said, "Now renting Porsches: This week only, half-price." That was very tempting, but it was still twice the cost of the little Opal station wagon I had rented. I had a choice to make, and I decided to stick with the Opal. One of the dumbest decisions of my life. I could have had a Porsche on the autobahn for 2 weeks! Instead, I'm stuck in this little Opal that started to shake wildly around 70 miles an hour. Parts started falling off the car at 80. And that was the fastest I could go downhill. I drove pedal to the floor the whole time and even downhill could only go 80, so disappointing. And I was being passed by all these Porsches and Audis and Mercedes. It was awful. All along the autobahn though were these little signs that gave a suggested speed limit (love the sound of that, "suggested" speed limit), and underneath the number was a little word, "genug" the German word for "enough." The sign is saying, "OK, you can drive fast on the autobahn, but at some point, enough is enough. Don't be stupid."

Here's what I think happened in our culture. We went through a period of unparalleled prosperity and were driving down this consumer road really, really fast, just out of control consumerism. We knew that we should probably slow down, that we were probably out of control, but hey, once I get this next thing, I'll slow it down...but we just kept the pedal down...and then a crash. And when you have a crash on the autobahn going 150 miles an hour, it isn't pretty. We are just now starting to climb out of the car to see the damage and we see this sign right by the wreck that says, "Enough!"

We have an opportunity to really live differently, not just value living differently but actually living that value. We have the opportunity in the wake of this crash to reevaluate the way we live. We can stay on the consumer highway, but we know where that leads, either to nowhere or somewhere worse than nowhere. Or we can jump the track to the generosity road, where we take that appetite for more and focus it on doing good, and what we will find is life that is truly life. I've never met anyone who jumped this track who wanted to go back. And there is incredible power in it, to enjoy what we do have without regret and to even move past a store or see something at someone else's house that you don't have and say to yourself, "I could get that. I could, but I'm choosing to be driven by something else."

To practice this, I'm going to encourage you to consider starting living differently by doing Christmas this year differently. Typically Christmas is the time where we amp up our consumerism even more, buying a bunch of things for each other to celebrate Jesus' birthday. Often we even say, "Oh, I hate buying for him or her. They are so hard to buy

for.” Why? Because they already have everything they need, and if they need something they just get it. So why are we buying something then?

A friend of mine who is a pastor in Ohio challenged his church on this, saying, “It ain’t your birthday.” We celebrate Jesus’ birthday by giving each other gifts, and he was just saying, what about Jesus? Because Jesus told us how to give to him. He says, “for as much as you have given to the least of these, you’ve given to me,” talking about the poor and the sick and the prisoner. Jesus so identifies with the poor that when we give to the poor, it is the same thing as giving to him. So, here is what we are going to do this year, in the spirit of this new way of living and since it isn’t our birthday. Let’s choose to place some additional limits on our Christmas spending, and instead give that same amount of money to Jesus on his birthday.

I’m not saying don’t buy anybody anything. If you have kids or grandkids, buy something if you can, and if you can’t let us know so we can help you buy something. If you have a 5 year old kid or an 8 year old, don’t give them this little piece of paper that says, “I gave your Christmas gift money away this year to the poor. Merry Christmas.” Don’t do that to kids, but why not consider limiting it considerably. Most of our kids are not destitute. You can even include them in the conversation. Let them decide how much to enjoy themselves and how much to give. For your friends our spouse, get creative and spend less so that you can give more. Every Christmas we take an out-of-control consumer culture and then drink consumerism red bull, get all hyped up in our spending, then we have this crash in January. Let’s do this Christmas differently.

What we are going to do is to establish a special Angel Tree fund. Every year, this year no exception, we do Angel Tree, where we provide food and gifts to those who can’t afford either. Our church is always amazingly generous. In addition to the angel tree gifts, we are also going to build up an angel tree fund to make available for people in our church and in our community who are in need. With the current economic realities, more and more people are coming to us for help, and we want to be help to them. Jesus commands us to, and nothing would thrill him more than for us to give him that gift. So, this week talk about this as a family if you are married, pray about it if you are single, and decide your Christmas budget differently than you might otherwise.

All that to get us started in 2009 on a new footing, with a new commitment, to take that desire, the appetite for more, and funnel it a new direction, not toward consumerism but generosity, to be consumed with good works, and in the process find life that is truly life.

Next week we will talk more specifically about what that looks like and how to get there. In this series, these first 2 weeks are about a new mindset, the next 2 weeks are designed to be very practical on how to live out the new mindset. Let’s come next week ready to think and live differently.

Pray.