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# *Women of Witness*

TIPS TO BETTER YOURSELF

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## **In Love with the Life You Don't Have**

**By Greg Morse**

The secret to happiness, some have wisely said, is to want what you already have.

How many of us can truly say with C.S. Lewis's character in *Shadowlands*, "You know, I don't want to be somewhere else anymore. I'm not waiting for anything new to happen . . . not looking around the next corner and over the next hill. I'm here now. That's enough."

Instead, unhappiness finds us wanting a life we don't have. If this, this, and this happens, then I'll be content. The easiest loves are the ones we don't have. Our neighbor's grass grows greener as we keep staring at it. If our desires could remain on our own property, we would be happier. We would better love the life we have.

This secret to happiness is not a new one. Centuries ago, puritan Jeremiah Burroughs (1599–1646) wrote in *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* that "A Christian comes to contentment, not so much by way of addition, as by way of subtraction" (45). He meant that the Christian achieves happiness not by adding more to life to satisfy his gaping desires, but instead by subtracting from his desires, bringing them down to the situation God has placed him.

Paul practiced this when he sought to curb young Timothy's desires for money, reasoning that we come into the world and leave it with nothing and that many have apostatized by this love. The apostle gives us a window into his own happiness, saying, "If we have food and clothing, with these we will be content" (1 Timothy 6:8). With just the basics of what we need for an adequate human existence, Paul will find what many kings with lavish palaces could not: contentment.

**You Shall Not Covet.** Long before Burroughs, the great Architect of man's happiness wove this happiness principle into creation itself. He etched instructions for his creatures' gladness in stone, saying, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's" (Exodus 20:17). In other words, keep your desires at home, want what you have, not what your neighbor has.

And he reiterates this word to the church, yet adds something we cannot afford to miss. The writer of Hebrews begins with the command,

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have. (Hebrews 13:5–6)

Here again, want what you already have. Don't slave to make your bank account rise to match your desires, but bring your desires down to match what God has put in your bank account. He reminds us that the answer to happiness is not bigger and better, but simpler and more grateful. "Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have."

**Be Content with Who You Have.** But the verse continues:

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5)

You might need to read the verse again. Did you see the shift?

God changes the focus for the Christian from what he has, to who he has. God tells us to do more than match our desires to our circumstances; we reconsider our circumstances based on the promise of enduring relationship with our God: I will never leave you nor forsake you.

Dissatisfaction has a voice. You should have that car. . . . You would be happy with his job or her husband. . . . If only you made double what you make now. . . . To this internal proposal, God means to add his own voice: "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

When discontent suggests, Your current job is okay, but you would be happier to have one that grants more recognition. . . .

God says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Your car does fine, but imagine how you would look if you had that one. . . .

"I will never leave you nor forsake you."

This church is technically faithful, but the pastor could be more entertaining — and the children's program . . . .

"I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Why don't I have a husband or children like she has?

"I will never leave you nor forsake you."

When we hear temptations to desire more and better, which voice do we listen to?

**Shallow Wells.** Now, getting a new job, a new car, or even a new church — or longing to be married and have children — these are not the issue. The issue is the internal restlessness and misguided search that leads us to climb from hill to hill expecting happiness just atop the next one. As we ascend the hill called “prestigious career,” or “beautiful wife,” or “bigger house,” we keep climbing, keep mumbling, keep searching for what we haven’t found.

“God gives himself as the grand punctuation to end our search for more.”

And while the world, the flesh, and the devil tempt us to chase and chase, God offers himself as the end of our satisfaction. He gives himself as the grand punctuation to end our search for more. Wonder of wonders, God does not merely say to his child, “The secret to happiness is to want what you already have.” He says, “The secret to happiness is to want what you already have in me.”

“Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,” Jesus promises, “but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again” (John 4:13–14). The only search that remains is to go deeper in communion with him.

**All We Could Want.** As sons and daughters of Adam, we ache under the dim memory of a forgotten past. A time when man walked with God, communing with him in perfect fellowship. Of gardens full of fruit, of a mission bestowing purpose, of pleasure and delight and satisfaction — none more than in the King of that realm.

“God says, ‘The secret to happiness is to want what you already have in me.’”

And though we have exchanged such knowledge and such glory for mere trifles of earth, for a life elsewhere, it has not worked. We look this way and that in vain for the kind of happiness our sin and Satan promised. In such condition it is not enough to scale back our desires to our circumstances. The darkness, the thirst, the sense of something else, the lost stare out the window will not subside on their own.

Jesus himself must be the Vine to withering branches, Living Water to parched places, Bread of Life to starving souls, Resurrection to lifeless bodies, the Way to lost wanderers, the Truth to deceived minds, the Shepherd for missing sheep, our Light in this present darkness. The secret to happiness is to be in union with this Christ, forgiven by this Christ, welcomed and forever belonging to God in this Christ. A Christ who promises that he will never leave us nor forsake us nor ever tire of being all we could ever want.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/in-love-with-the-life-you-dont-have>