**Week 3 – Consumption, Comparison, and Contentment**

At the end of last week’s study we looked at two verses about contentment. Contentment is a destination everyone wants, but few take the right paths to get there. Tonight we look at two wrong paths in our pursuit of contentment – consumption and comparison.

***Consumption***

“If we are really honest, we can probably recall moments where we stopped long enough to do the math and realized that ‘more’ and ‘happiness’ don’t equate.” (Crosson and Talamo, Page 93)

As we begin to talk about consumption, we already know that stuff can’t make us happy, yet somehow we can still be tricked into believing that compiling and consuming stuff just might provide us some joy that we are missing.

If there ever was the poster boy for “try it all, do it all, consume it all” it was Solomon. What he writes in Ecclesiastes is a journal of the pursuit of happiness in a million ways and the documentation of the emptiness he felt in all but one of the paths he tried.

Ecclesiastes 2:8-10

**8**I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man. **9**So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. **10**And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil.  **11**Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

How does Solomon describe the end result of his pursuits? Why do people return to greed and consumption when history and experience have shown again and again the emptiness found there?

Ecclesiastes 5:10-12

**10**He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity. **11**When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? **12**Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep.

What does this passage teach regarding the fleeting nature of any sense of satisfaction in things we would consume? Consumption and materialism “spawn a false sense of security,” says Randy Alcorn, “Why ask God for daily bread if you own the bakery?” (What are your “bakeries”? i.e. places that you have abundance and might be tempted to forget that it is from God, not by your own hand?)

***Comparison***

Whatever form it comes in, comparison is a trap that Satan has used through all of time. Cain killed Abel because he fell into comparison and jealousy. Whether we compare ourselves with others to elevate ourselves or devalue ourselves, it throws us off track of where we need to be. Which is more of a comparison temptation for you, elevating yourself or devaluing yourself? (“I’m glad I am better there than…” or “I’ll never be as good at that as …”)

The other comparison trap is when we compare other people to each other and because of that comparison show favoritism. Let’s read James 2:1-9.

My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. **2**For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in,**3**and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” **4**have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? **5**Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? **6**But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? **7**Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called? **8**If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. **9**But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

Why are we tempted to compare people and show favoritism to some? What are we hoping to gain when we do this? What does the passage say are the adverse effects of this favoritism? (dishonoring the poor, lifting up the oppressor) What do these mean?

One more quote about comparison from our resource book – “Comparison is the archenemy of personal contentment.” (Crosson and Talamo, Page 108) Where have you seen this to be true? That quote also leads well into our last section - Contentment

***Contentment***

As we root out comparison, we are preparing ourselves to learn about contentment. Last week, we introduced the theme of contentment by looking at I Timothy 6:6-10 and Hebrews 13:5. (Option: review those two passages). Let’s continue to dive in with what Scripture teaches about contentment by reading Philippians 4:11-13.

**11**Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. **12**I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. **13**I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

American Christians love taking verse 13 and applying it to doing anything we put our mind to, like excelling at sports, but contextually, what is this verse really about? How you ever observed a brother or sister in Christ who modeled this well – who was joyful and content even when they faces times of being “brought low” or “in need”?

Contentment isn’t a goal at the end of the path, it is a central part of how you do the journey. It is not “one day I will be content when I get to this certain place” but “now I will be content because in Christ I have all I need”.

***Reflect***

Based on Scripture covered tonight, what is your most needed area of “homework”?

* Consumption – Pursuit of money and “stuff” is a temptation and a distraction for me and I must grow wise in consistently identifying that “more” and “happiness” do not equate.
* Comparison – I need to shed off the temptations and traps of comparison, whether it is comparing myself to others or comparing others in ways that lead me to show favoritism.
* Contentment – I need to grow in my belief and application that I have all I need for contentment in Jesus Christ.